

THE
ROSE-COLOURED
ROOM

MAUDE LITTLE

Hubert Mathews C. Webster

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The Rose-coloured Room

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by

MAUDE LITTLE

Author of "A Woman on the Threshold"

"The Children's Bread"

&c.

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TO
"THE OTHERS"

PERSONS

MICHAEL QUENTIN, *a rich young man.*

RACIE MOORE, *his friend, a journalist.*

MRS. TRATHBYE, *an Irish widow of good family.*

DRUSILLA }
ESSIE } *her daughters.*
KATHLEEN }

MISS CAROLINE TRATHBYE, *her sister-in-law.*

ALEXANDER COWIE, *a young doctor.*

THOMAS PATULLO, *a tutor.*

GRACE MORLAND, *a teacher of gymnastics.*

MRS. WYLIE, *Michael's landlady.*

A POOR IRISHWOMAN.

A LITTLE BOY.

COWIE'S MOTHER AND SISTERS.

Various Members of the Eire Club, Michael's Servants, etc.

*The Scene is laid at Glasgow and at Michael Quentin's
country house on the Ayrshire coast.*

The Time is the present day.

CHAPTER I

THE COMING

MICHAEL QUENTIN and Racie Moore were drinking coffee in the garden. The honey-coloured glow of the lamp, standing on a little table, illumined the forms of the two young men up to their collars: their faces were in darkness and behind them and above them there were the deeply coloured dim masses of trees and the moonless night sky. The foliage stirred faintly; and the soft incessant sounds of the sea came from a distance. Michael and Racie could see on their left a broken row of radiant oblong windows and the vague pale form of the house itself.

"It's a beautiful night," Michael said, speaking with an intonation which subtly suggested the current of Irish blood.

Racie was silent.

"It's a beautiful night," Michael repeated. . . .
"Lovely." His voice was insistent.

"I thought every night was beautiful to you," Racie said with a gently mirthful irony.

"Yes," Michael said. . . . "Isn't it a beautiful night?"

Racie swirled towards him in a sudden keen inquiry.

"Why do you say that?" In animation Racie's voice had the same fluctuations as Michael's, and his articulation, like Michael's, was throaty.

"Because it *is* a beautiful night," Michael said with a gurgle of laughter.

"I wish you wouldn't be so Maeterlinckish," Racie

said . . . "and so insincere. You meant that the night was beautiful in a quite special sense, I suppose. You spoke about its beauty on purpose—as a prelude to something you are going to say, I suppose."

"I don't know that I'll say anything," Michael said.

"As you will," Racie replied. He set down his coffee-cup and accepted the cigar that Michael offered him. The match-blaze, palpitating in the drowsily moving air, made a variable blotch of red-gold brightness, including part of Racie's face, sheening the skin of his nose and lips and glinting in his dark eyes.

"I'll tell you," said Michael. . . . "I'll tell you. No, thanks, I've given up smoking. . . . This night seems more beautiful than any night I've seen. All the world seems different somehow. Don't be afraid. I'm not going to say something about the livelier emerald twinkling in the grass, or the purer sapphire melting into the sea."

"Well, you might as well," Racie said. "What you have said is so commonplace . . . and what you've done is also frightfully commonplace."

"Done?" Michael said. "Done!" he repeated on his top note, soaring from inquiry to indignation. "Who said I'd done ann'thing?"

"How Irish we are!" Racie said, derisive; and Michael flushed angrily in the darkness. "I think you overdo it," Racie went on. "You won't get a real Celt to be quite as Celtic as you are."

"I am a real Celt," Michael said solemnly. "My father was a Kerryman. My mother was Scottish with a good deal of Highland blood in her. We'll not discuss it," he added in a hurt, haughty tone; and a silence followed. Once or twice Racie moved restlessly in his chair and breathed forcibly so that his red

cigar-end started into brightness. Michael, sitting erect, was watching three moths swooping and skirmishing round the lamp-glow.

"Well?" Racie said, with the faintest touch of sheepishness. "Well, Mick?"

Michael's dark shape relaxed.

"Tell us the thing you haven't done?" Racie asked, reassuming the tone in which he habitually addressed Michael. It was a mingling of toleration, banter, and impatience. Racie's voice, unstimulated by any kind of emotion, was a very quiet one; it kept on a few middle notes and its monotony suggested fatigue.

"I haven't fallen in love," Michael said, a laugh intermingling with his speech. "Sorry. You'd have liked some definite copy, I know."

"Don't be bitter," Racie said. "I couldn't make acceptable copy out of you now. *The Glasgow Evening Mercury* doesn't take an interest in you any longer. People are tired of you and your queer house now. We'd give you a paragraph if you died or married—that's all. Even the Woman's Column leaves you and your house alone."

"I'm not interesting to women," Michael said huffily. "I wish you wouldn't cough in that abominable way. Papers like *The Mercury* do a lot to lower the standards of womanhood and manhood. The Woman's Column with its beastly advice, as if it were the aim of every woman to catch a man. . . . You know that sort of thing is a lie." In Racie's silence Michael became aggressive. "It's a lie," he repeated. "A woman doesn't go about, like Diogenes, looking for a man. I've never seen any signs of it."

"You!" Racie uttered, compunctious.

"Candidly now, have you?"

"Of course," Racie said, and stopped, his face slightly warm. He reflected that Michael had five thousand a year and a wealth of delusions. A man with so much money could afford them. Again and again Racie had said to his own bitter chafing impatience that it was a mere waste of energy to try to open the eyes of a man who, stumbling in darkness, could afford to pay a surgeon for attendance to his injuries. Racie had taken his cigar from his mouth to utter his hopeless "Of course": he replaced the cigar, settled himself back in his chair, muttering, as a sort of concession to his own irritation: "Oh, I don't know, 'f course not; I've no money."

"*The Mercury's* got into your blood and brain!" Michael said with a Celtic intensity.

"Quicksilver?" Racie said. "Or my paper? That reminds me, Mick, if you want to say anything—or ann'thing (God bless ould Ireland!)—better say it, for I'll have to catch that ten-ten to Glasgow."

"I've told Tosh we'll want the motor," Michael said, nodding. "Half-past nine's lots of time. . . . When I said things were changed I meant it. I can't tell you anything, Racie, I don't know."

"Don't know?"

"I know nothing," Michael said, rocking his chair on the turf. "Only, there's a change coming to me . . . there's something coming. . . . I don't know what it is. It may be a revelation of God. It may be Death. It may be human love." And at the last name only Michael's voice quivered, and Racie was shaken into a silence which was partly embarrassed, but partly troubled.

In the deeply coloured mass of the trees and shrubs,

on the left side of the pale uncertain shape of the house, something was purring, as a tiger might purr in the close-knit jungle under a sky unpierced by stars. Presently the eyes of the brute shone out, yellow and ray-streaming, and it came near and then went far off again in a slow curving rush. Racie and Michael rose and stood for a minute, reluctant, in the little pool of brightness and lulling odours round which the moths were wistfully flying.

"Funny thing," Racie said. "Funny *you* never need to do a thing unless you like. You do all your mortifying of the flesh voluntarily. I don't doubt you think you do a lot."

"Rubbish," Michael said. . . . "You're so obstinately stupid in some things. I've never said anything to lead you to suppose that I believed in mortifying the flesh. God made the flesh . . . only He made the soul too. It must be easy to keep your flesh in its right place once your soul has seen God."

"What's its right place?" Racie asked.

"On its knees," Michael said, with that self-conscious intensity of his.

Racie had a swift mental vision of the crucifix that hung in the white studio in Michael's house; a crucifix of ivory and ebony, terrible, uncompromising, the drooping, dying figure white against the austere black of the cross. And under the rood, set on a white and silver table, Michael always kept roses, crimson and white: massed and tumbled as they were, they touched the feet of the figure on the cross and seemed, fantastically, to blossom from the red stigmata—the soul's joys flowering from the body's anguish. . . . Michael Quentin could afford to have roses all the year round. A ridiculous set piece altogether; a thing

that Michael, meaning that men should not see, must have actually designed to make an impression on God. "Pour épater le bon Dieu!" Racie said to himself, humorous, in the dismal journalese of *The Glasgow Evening Mercury*. . . . Well, no harm had been done by the costly crucifix with its singular fashion of glorifying the flesh that God had made. No harm had been done by the roses, nor by the white studio and the rest of the house. Michael Quentin had five thousand a year, and might have done more evil had he taken to philanthropy on a large scale.

They walked round the wide curve of the drive, the shell with which it was strewn making a soft crushing sound under their feet. In front of the house, in the dim, vaguely edged wash of light, the colours of things showed in subdued tones—the dull blue-greens of shrubs and trees, the grey-green of grass, the silvery whiteness of the broken shell on the drive, the warmer whitenesses of the steps, the porch, and house-front, rather recently built and diapered now with a meagre design of trained branches and stems. The motor was clicking and purring. Tosh, with his splendid shoulders, stood by it, saluting as they passed into the house.

On the way to the station, which stood on the Fauldstane road, Racie said :

"I suppose you will be in on Thursday night to the meeting of the club?"

"Yes," Michael said. "I'll see you there? It's to be old Patullo's paper, you know. I wonder what sort of thing he'll do." There was a touch of uneasiness in Michael's laugh—the awkward attempt of an altruist, self-defensive, to range himself with the majority who smiled at old Patullo.

Racie was sensitive to a false note in Michael : he replied with a cold gravity :

“ Patullo was a brilliant man, they say.”

“ Who ? ” Michael exclaimed, astonished, compunctious ; swiftly apprehending piteousness in the career of old Patullo, the coach, with his petunia nose, his wet eyes, and tremulous movements.

“ They,” Racie said, with his quick guttural laugh.

The faltering talk yielded to silence. The motor was running inland, climbing up and swooping down a succession of slopes in the road that lay between the wide palenesses of unreaped grain-fields and blossomy meadows, intersected by hedgerows and walls, black in the night. Often they passed a group of dark farm-buildings, inset here and there with the golden oblongs of lighted windows ; or a big cluster of trees, their foliage swinging to a soft “ hush-hush ” and yielding vegetable odours to the air. The swish and boom of the sea was fainter and fainter to their ears ; at the turning of corners the motor-horn twanked ; once Tosh suddenly slowed down and laughed as the glare showed two brown rabbits in the road.

Still silent, Michael and Racie strode along the lonely station platform set in this country of fields and farms. A mournful little wind from the sea was blowing now, gently shaking dark shades over the lower sky. A lamp-bearing porter, like a great glow-worm, crossed the metals ; there was the clash of signals.

“ Coming,” Racie said mechanically, in a town-dweller’s way of saying things that none desires to hear nor to speak.

The train came and there was a shouting, a flaring of lights, a clapping of doors. Racie, dark-eyed and

white-faced, in his crush hat and grey overcoat, leaned from the window, shaking hands : the guard waved his green flag, and stepped, with a railwayman's admirable casualness, on to the out-going train. . . . Michael was left on the platform, in the indigo dimness, with the softly blowing breeze, the sparse golden lights, the faltering sounds of the train's retreat, of its quick, suddenly checked hoots, suggestive of some half-uttered human emotion of mirth or grief. From the country, blurring the blue-blackness of the June night with the grey rising of its mists, there came that mingling of noises that is like the breath, the stirring of a great creature, lying cool and mysterious in its sleep, but with the time of awakening always at hand. The purple sky, too, seemed to thrill, expectant.

"Coming, sir?" Tosh said with a humorous patience with his employer's oddity, as Michael came into the road.

"Coming," Michael answered, with delight in the chance repetition of the appropriate word. He repeated it to himself as the motor ran homewards, climbing and dipping, between the pallid fields and the dark hedges.

"Coming . . . coming . . . "

"Well then, I wonder *what's* coming," Michael said to himself with an enjoying laugh, as his sense of humour, like a will-o'-the-wisp, went scuttering across the stage on which his egotism posed and pondered and suffered.

II

Michael Quentin's house stood at a corner where the road that ran inland to Fauldstane made an acute angle with the sea-road : the house had consequently

been named "The Corner House." The same rebellion against the traditions of villadom as had led to the choice of the simple name had regulated the building of the house itself. It was a little house : set in its twenty acres of greensward, gardens, and woodland, it was a white cottage, hardly bigger than the two white lodges at its western and northern gates. Two gardeners, local men, dwelling in these white lodges, had, during the eighteen months that had passed since "The Corner House" was built, disseminated knowledge of Michael Quentin's eccentricities. But now the gardeners almost took him and his house for granted, and the tradesmen's carts passed in and out at the northern gate with hardly the exchange of a jest. As Racie had said, people had become accustomed to Michael Quentin's funny house. His domestic servants, visiting friends in the neighbourhood, were only now and then called upon to entertain a stranger with a description of the interior of the crazy building ; and sometimes a passenger, leaning over the railings of one of the bright-funnelled panting steamers that issued from the Firth of Clyde, would point to Michael's place and say :

"That's Quentin's house. Oh, you *must* ! The house that the papers made such fun of a year or two ago ? "

If the subject were pursued, what followed was incoherent and tame ; for the truth is that there was nothing really funny about Michael Quentin's house. It was less ridiculous than thousands of houses which are seriously built and bought and sold. It was by dint of mere repetition that the western papers had persuaded the public to accept the house as a joke. It must have been a disappointment to those who went

to see it in the expectation of being amused : for it was merely an innocent-looking white cottage, with a door and seven windows at the front. A thin pattern of rambler-rose blooms and branches was trailed between the casements, austere decorative as in a Watts picture. Three broad steps led up to the door and there was a simple porch ; and the door and porch, like the house walls, were very white. The cottage had two stories and the upper one was entirely occupied by the studio, the glass roof of which blazed in the sunshine, or shimmered bluely through rains and dimnesses.

This studio in itself was locally accepted as a sign that Michael Quentin was "not quite all there." In the first place, a man who neither photographed nor painted did not need a studio, did he ? But the singularity of possessing a studio was lost sight of in the amazing eccentricity of keeping the place locked, of cleaning it himself, and of bringing fresh roses into it every day. There were some who said that Michael Quentin had had an unhappy love-affair, which had somewhat unhinged his mind ; and that the white studio was a kind of offering to the dead or lost "young lady." But others, finding it improbable that "he" would look at a woman, believed that the studio was the temple of some weird religion which was styled "Theosophy."

The painters who had come down from the city to decorate the house had, before leaving, made it public that the studio was as white as snow from floor to ceiling, and that each of the seven rooms on the ground floor was done up in a different colour ; and these statements were confirmed by Michael's indoor servants, Helen the housemaid, Muriel the parlourmaid,

and Mattie the housekeeper and cook. As a local woman, Mattie gave the feeling of the neighbourhood pretty accurately when she said that there was no harm in the seven colours on the ground floor, but that a snow-white studio was going too far.

Another freak of the architect—goaded by Michael Quentin—was this : there was no hall. You stepped at once from the white porch, with its meagre twistings of rambler-rose trails, into the central room, the largest of the seven. It was green : a white staircase mounted from it to the studio. Each of the seven rooms extended from the front of the house to the back, and each had a back door of its own. Mattie gave her word to any one to whom she was speaking that she never knew who was in the house. How could she know ? She admitted that the place was not draughty—which, she said, was a miracle—and that the doors and windows were well secured. The pity was that there were so many of them ! Interiorly, each room gave on the next, the green room in the centre of necessity giving on two, the one yellow, the other blue. The rest of the primary colours were represented in the orange room, opening off the yellow, and the indigo room, opening off the blue ; while at the ends of the house were a violet guest-chamber and a red kitchen and accessories. Every room had a deep white frieze, and the dominant colour was additionally tempered by notes leading to and from the hue that prevailed in the neighbouring chamber. Thus, there were green jars in the yellow room and a deep orange curtain hung over its door giving on the orange room ; while the orange room—the dining-room—with its large admixture of white, had spots and sparks of luminous reds reminiscent of the warm walls of the

kitchen glowing beyond. It had been Michael's intention to offer this beautiful orange room to his servants as a sitting-room—(for in the night they slept at the larger lodge with the head gardener and his wife, a childless couple)—but the women had declined, Muriel and Helen smilingly, Mattie hotly. Sit in a room of that colour? She did not want to get "the bile" as she remembered her mother once doing when she sewed a yellow table-centre for a sale of work. It added to Mattie's contempt, and to the languid amusement of the local people generally, that Michael Quentin should alternate his passions for complete solitude with fits of undignified loquacity in which he would wander or sit up half the night with his friends from town, or would walk and talk with any sort of tramp or lost creature on the roads. "You never know what he'll do next," Mattie said to the tradesmen at the door of the red-and-white kitchen.

Unconsciously, with the sure voice of the simple, she struck the key-note of Michael's life. He himself never knew what he was going to do next.

Michael's father had been a publican; an Irishman of the lower middle class, a Catholic, frugal, devout, humble, industrious. He had toiled up from a little clerking job in a restaurant at the age of fifteen, through a travellership for a wine-merchant, to the possession of a public-house—of two public-houses—of five—of half a score. At a hydropathic he had met the Storringtons; and had finally married Elsa Storrington, a middle-class girl, eager, iron-willed, full of sex feeling, full of ambition; not pretty nor clever, but with a cruel, haughty self-exaltation that secured to her most of the privileges of beauty and brilliance. She had dominated her husband, and vampirishly

absorbed all that he offered her, always with that terrible air of a woman assured of her right to take. She mesmerised him into believing that she was, or had been, a beauty, and mesmerised him and many others into a faith in her connection with some noble English family—not any particular noble English family. Quentin deferred to her on all points of social conduct, listening patiently to her “tips” garnered from etiquette books and to her aggressively voiced wonder at his ignorance of observances, the existence of which she herself had learned a few hours before from the current number of the *Woman's Friend* or the *Social Guide*. . . . Michael was his mother's only child and the victim of all her caprices, ignorances, and passions. His father's domestic life was only a constant abdication of rights ; and the State, which came between the little ragamuffin and the parents who wanted too often to kick him, did not feel authorised to subject to inquiry a home as brilliantly prosperous and respectable as the Quentins. Mrs. Quentin experimented on Michael and no one asked her to show a licence. She began to give the child reading lessons when he was two and a half ; when he was three she delighted herself with giving him piano lessons, scolding savagely when he wept, laughing sentimentally at the sight of his doughy little hands trying to stretch over the keys. When he was five she engaged a professional, an inferior musician to whom she had taken a fancy, to teach the unmusical Michael the violin. The futility continued to absorb his energy for the next three or four years when, tired of it, she buried it in the mass of other subjects that she desired her son to learn. Michael was plunged into the study of five foreign languages, of which in maturity he retained only a few

fragments of vocabulary, a few oaths, a few lines of verse, and a confused remembrance of vivid pictures, huge compositions in which wild pigs ate acorns in forests, peasants reaped fields, tourists climbed hills, and mail-coaches, preceded by barking dogs, chased motors through villages full of market-women, soldiers, sailors, and firemen. Michael sampled many expensive schools, in Scotland and in England. His mother seldom allowed him to stay in a school for more than a year : for she either quarrelled with one of his masters or was disappointed because the family of one of his schoolfellows had not encouraged a friendship. . . . When Michael was seventeen, he was called home from his last English school by the death of his father : his mother, after some vaguely motivated dwellings in various towns, went to Oxford. Here Michael put in two terms at the University ; then his mother, taking a dislike to a colleague of his, took her son to Germany. She died at Bonn, leaving Michael, aged twenty-two, snatched out of a cloud of studies, dazed, ignorant, uncouth, friendless.

Emerging slowly from the confusion of feelings caused by his mother's death, and the intellectual confusion of law business, Michael realised that he was rich and in a sense at liberty. His mother—who had had absolute control of the family finances—had left a few legacies to societies and individuals, chiefly servants, but had made her son the heir of the bulk of her wealth, on the condition that he did not go to live in Ireland, but kept and built on the twenty acres of land which she had recently bought in North Ayrshire, her native place. Her last earthly ambition had been to build a country house with an avenue, a garage, and a tennis-court ; and, as her death had drawn

nearer, she had been obsessed by visions of rose-alleys and lawns, and of herself, surrounded by gold tea-services, sandwiches, and strawberries, playing hostess to a crowd of well-dressed people; to the cruel reluctant crowd of her long lonely imaginings—the elusive crowd of refined friends that had always melted away at her eager approach.

She had divined in her son the growth of the defiance that she aroused in all with whom she came into intimate contact. In their rushings to and fro, their social flounderings and helpless graspings at culture, Michael's reverence for his mother had been fretted away. He no longer subscribed to the dogmas of her beauty and good breeding: he saw her every day more surely as a stupid elderly woman, a trivial bully, with a face ignobly lined. Her dress appeared to him unbecoming: her self-styled English accent, in which he had gloried in his childhood, was only the Scottish variation of English spoken more loudly than was usual. Her shame of his father's nationality, relations, and trade, became a thing for blushes: as were her uneasiness in society, her dreads for him, her furtive searchings in dictionaries and society papers, her scrambling efforts to be the first to dissolve an acquaintanceship, to utter a jeer or formulate a criticism. He was revolted by her vindictiveness towards those who had ignored or satirised her; and her religious observances, always in churches socially important, jarred on him. He could not believe in their sincerity; and he was exasperated by her Sunday figure, by the smugness of her kid gloves, by her drooped eyelids and the folds that came in her chin as she ostentatiously bowed and knelt. Late in her life, she became an Episcopalian; attracted by a handsome

curate, fancying a touch of piquancy in this less popular form of worship ; observing holy-days, scurrying, fussy and cross, to early Communion on Easter morning, or, fur-swathed, driving to Christmas Eve carol-singsings. She affected to know nothing of the habits of the Presbyterian sects, asking skittishly if all Scottish churches were not much the same. Michael could not have told what their differences were : but he was chilled by his mother's religion of social expediency, by her showy genuflexions, by her bazaar committees, subscriptions, and squabbles. . . . His love turned to the image of his father, a formerly uncomprehended being, now radiant with the virtues that this woman lacked. Michael's heart grew more resentful of his mother's shame—of her animus against Ireland, against Romanists, even against “ the trade.” In his childhood he had laughed at her caricatures of his father's speech and manners ; a little later he had winced ; then he had writhed and flushed. From seeming pitiable, his father's figure had become tolerable, then venerable. Michael began, surreptitiously, to read Irish literature, he began to study Erse. He paid secret visits to the theatres in which the Abbey Theatre Company played on their visits to Scotland : he went into chapels and sat dreaming through uncomprehended beautiful masses : he crossed to Ireland and contemplated a long visit, a final residence. It was as if he were called by something that was further back, yet more familiar, than the neglected figure of his father.

Mrs. Quentin was in truth a stupid, elderly woman : but her motherly feeling, the jealous sense that her son was her possession, made her aware of the gradual decay of Michael's filial loyalty. Before her death she

was even a little conscious that he was ashamed of her. She was tortured by a jealousy of her husband's humble figure with his lowly virtues—his charity, his humility, and industry, his exquisite bodily asceticism, his devoutness which recked not of kid gloves and bazaar committees. She feared him, so long after his death, and, enraged, she struggled against that triumphant humbleness. The condition which her will imposed on her son was the last effort of her material force against the psychic forces of her husband and his nation. She hoped that, in chaining Michael's body to these acres on the Ayrshire coast, she might prevent his spirit from wandering ; she had worded her will so that, read in the emotional atmosphere which hangs about a house where a death has happened, it might appeal to Michael's heart rather than to his common-sense ; for the poor woman was beginning to surmise that Michael's common-sense was not a thing on which one could count.

In fearing that he might be carried away by feeling to the renouncement of his fortune, she may have done Michael an injustice ; for he was fond of money, as romantic people usually are ; and he had been accustomed to meagre allowances, arbitrarily bestowed and withdrawn, so the prospect of handling and spending at his pleasure was fresh and alluring. Yet it was merely natural that his dominant motive in acquiescing in the conditions of the will should be a mingling of feelings that passed for filial love—pity for his mother's desperate failing grip on his life, regret that he was not really sorry that she was dead, emotions of early admiration and faith galvanised into life by memory. He accepted the twenty acres and—still in obedience to the will—began to consider the building

of a house : but Mrs. Quentin had stipulated nothing about the time of erection, and Michael let two years wander by before he began to build.

His mother's death had not brought him complete enfranchisement. He must still be in a measure what she had made him—not at all what she had desired to make him, but the result of the struggle between her vague violent wishes and the other forces within and outside of himself. His mother's grip on his life, feeble and frantic with the fear of losing hold, had still been potent to retard, to make his progress timid and uncertain ; and, after her death, Michael found it difficult to realise that he was unburdened and free. He still must move fearfully and confusedly for a time : but gradually there grew on him a sense of the splendour of the many high roads and by-ways of life. He was free to rush along any he chose ! But this very consciousness of their wonder and of how much time he had wasted inert, having no knowledge of them, increased his aimlessness. He wanted to do so much that he did not know where to begin ; and the old timidity, the gawky self-distrust which was the result of his mother's atmosphere of competition, made it difficult for him to do anything at all.

He visited Ireland in the company of Racie Moore, whose acquaintance he had made at a Socialist meeting in Glasgow. Mrs. Quentin's will did not forbid *visits* to Ireland ; and after the silent Racie, with his air of a faint surprise, had gone back to *The Glasgow Evening Mercury*, Michael remained for some months in the west, seeking the things that he had read and dreamed, and—such is the power of faith—finding some of them. He came back to Scotland with an extended Irish vocabulary and with an affected increase of the vocal

rise-and-fall that he had inherited from his father. In Glasgow he became a member of a small eclectic Socialist society; but it turned on him because, in conformity to his mother's example, he supposed that influence could be acquired by offering to pay for things. He joined a literary society in which he made no friends and not even enemies. Then he entered Glasgow University, where, during two sessions, he intensely studied science. The subject of colour had always interested him: now for a time it enthralled him. He thought of making a book, in which he should consider colour chemically, æsthetically, and ethically; and it was with a mingling of disappointment and timid relief that he discovered that people had already published books on the subject. He continued to experiment in the effects of colours on his own character, and to dream of a world regenerated by the wise distribution of the hues of the rainbow. He had his rooms repeatedly painted in different colours; then, with a keen joy, he conceived the idea of building a house which should be coloured to minister to his various emotional needs and to assist his intellectual and moral development. The twenty acres in North Ayrshire and the conditions of his mother's will ceased to be a wrong. Michael fastened on the subject of architecture, came and went excitedly with young Rollo, the architect whom Racie had introduced to him.

It was not till the plan of the seven coloured rooms was developed that Michael haltingly spoke of the white studio. He had felt afraid that Rollo would laugh; and it was with a delighted amazement that he found that Rollo was touched and impressed. Rollo told Michael that he himself had for long been a

student of the ethical significance of colour; and he grasped with a wonderful sympathetic readiness at Michael's furtive ideas. They spoke shyly of purity and of the aids afforded by religions; and Michael explained that he was not a Roman Catholic, that his sense of humour, or his modern complexity, stood in the way; but that the beautiful religion of his father's people had a stronghold somewhere in his heart, that he was building up for himself a faith which accepted much of the mysticism of the Roman Church while rejecting what was gross or inhuman.

Rollo nodded; agreeing that agnosticism was an old-fashioned thing and rotten. A man needed to search for God: it was—the language of Michael and Rollo almost stated—fine fun to search for God. An adventure! Rollo was eager about Michael's idea of studying and praying in a white studio. But when the house was finished and he was permitted to enter the decorated snowy room, he pointed to the crimson roses below the crucifix.

"Well . . ." Michael said, "it's the most beautiful kind. . . . The stigmata are red if you come to that. It's the colour that means love."

When they were leaving the house, Rollo gazed like one seeing visions and asked:

"Why don't you have a rose-coloured room? You could have it added."

"I don't want it," Michael said in an angry surprise.

Rollo apologised. . . . He was known to be presumptive as well as slightly crazy; and he died shortly afterwards. It was just Michael Quentin's luck, for he had felt that he and Rollo were going to understand each other always.

Racie Moore . . . was different. Yet he and

Michael went to and fro together. If Michael wanted Racie he always found him : if he called to him Racie always came. The thought had come to Michael that, though he might never use his wealth for the liberation of Ireland, as he had long ago dreamed of doing, he might still find a patriotic labour. Glasgow was full of poor Irish, distressed, toiling, drunken, criminal. Michael had seen glimpses of their lives when he was going about with Racie, who was writing special slumming articles for *The Weekly Mercury*. And there were other Irish aliens, not distressed nor drunken, whom he might be the means of bringing together. Suddenly, as was his way, he dreamed of a return, like the fabled return of the Jews to Zion. A return of all Ireland to the pure faith of the old saints, then a return of all the world, led back—by Ireland!—to God. In that humble island there sprang and blossomed the virtues that the proud world forgot—simplicity, chastity, poverty, gentleness, the endurance of scorn. His father, from being a round-shouldered man with an extensive knowledge of whiskies, had been glorified into an epitome of all those virtues, the symbol of the glorious Ireland to come, with her poetry and drama, her humane and rational rule, her free and great Church with tolerance for every doubt and reverence for every rule. Michael, on his knees before the crucifix, vowed that he would keep his life pure for Ireland's service ; that his friendships should be staunch and sane ; that if human love came into his life it should be holy in its beauty and joy, as those roses at the foot of the cross. . . .

He founded the Eire Club.

III

Michael came in out of the warm moistness of the night, and, with a gesture to the hoistman, ran upstairs. On the topmost landing an open door showed about a score of persons assembled in a room where there were gas-lights and benches and a green wooden table with a carafe and glass upon it.

On the last page of the green syllabus of the Eire Club, under the title "Objects of the Club," there were printed two items :

"To form a fraternity of Celtic men and women, resident in Glasgow, regardless of social distinctions, or differences in religion and politics.

"To study Celtic literature, especially the poetry and myths of ancient Ireland."

Starting the club, Michael had wished to bear all the expenses himself, making subscriptions optional ; but Racie Moore had represented to him, with so fair a show of reason, the degrading effects of such a policy, that Michael had yielded to the suggestion of a tax of two shillings on each member.

"You won't get the right sort of people without a subscription," Racie said. "The right sort of people like paying for things even when they can't."

"You're a fearful lunatic," Michael said with a laugh ; but, on Racie's declaration of seriousness, had assented with the puzzled air that implies doubts in reserve. . . . Michael had inserted notices in the prominent Glasgow papers, summoning "those interested" to his help in forming the club : he had wished to advertise for "men and women of Irish blood," but Racie had said :

"Better not be too particular about the blood.

Take any one that comes—then you'll have a chance of getting hold of the right sort of people."

This was the sixth time that the club had met—leaving out of count the preliminary business meeting. Michael, who was chairman, sat down in his place at the green table, and, gazing at the people in the benches, tried to keep himself from realising his failure. The right sort of people ? . . . He had visualised a little ring of poetry lovers, of fellow-countrymen and patriots, without hate ; the poor and the well-to-do united by a common passion and faith.

Now he sat in his place at the green table and gazed at the people in the benches. The right sort of people ? . . . Were these people really interested in Celtic literature ? In literature of any sort ? In anything ? . . . Oh, stodge ! Suddenly brave, with a scornful courage created by impatience, Michael tore away the self-pitying illusion that there was in the present membership of the Eire Club any germ which could develop into the Eire Club of his dreams. It was grotesque, but it was true, that those people had not the dimmest conception of his thought in founding the club. At his first interview with " those interested " who had responded to his advertisement, he had felt this want of comprehension, but had stubbornly struggled against it, persuading himself that out of the ruck, with their blank eyes and irrelevant talk, the right sort of people were bound to emerge. He had made a speech on that first night and had felt, such was the glow in his heart, that they must come to understand each other. He remembered the awkward ashamed looks and coughs, the relief with which they had started to go home. . . . Oh, stodge ! They had not understood.

Michael felt that Racie Moore was glancing at him. As secretary, Racie sat on Michael's left ; a pale young man with thick dark hair. His long-lashed, full-lidded eyes were usually downcast ; and looking at his profile as he sat at the table, Michael's thoughts often wandered to those mysterious side-faces in Egyptian drawings. Racie's air was not so much that of one who has become tired of life as of one who believes that getting tired is not worth while. Now he just glanced up out of the corner of his eye.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Michael said, rising, "Mr. Patullo is going to read a paper to us to-night." He looked down at old Thomas Patullo, the treasurer, who sat on his right. "I'm sure we'll all have great pleasure in listening to Mr. Patullo," Michael said with a nervous shake of his head, and speaking without verisimilitude. "His paper's about our national poet, O'Reilly. Uh ! . . . Mr. Patullo, as I dare say many of you know, is the son of an Irish mother and a Scottish father. My own mother was Scottish and my father Irish. But I have always felt, as I said on the night of our first meeting, that the Irish half of me is somehow stronger, more alive, more real——"

"The better half," old Patullo put in, and there was a stodgy laugh.

At the interruption, Michael's mind swerved. He stammered, for he had a slight impediment which had been neglected in his childhood, owing to his mother's quarrels with the doctors ; and it beset him when he was nervous.

"Uh—uh—I said then and I say it again," Michael went on, "we don't want to remember we're Irish for any political reasons——"

"Hear, hear !" came from a man on the back seat.

Several persons turned and stared unpleasantly at him.

“Uh !—any political reasons,” Michael said. “What our Irish club—I should say our *Celtic* club—has got to do is not to look back for the wrongs and miseries of the past, but for the things in the past that are glorious and beautiful and eternal ; and to look forward, too, into the future, and see how these eternities join the past and the future into one. It isn’t just for Ireland’s own sake we’re to do this. Our effort to keep up the feeling of our nationality isn’t the narrow thing it seems. It has a wider significance—a great, eternal meaning. You remember long ago it was to Ireland that the saints and mystics came with the beliefs that were to change the Western world. Can something of the same kind not happen over again to-day ? Are there not signs of it ? I mean—it’s like this. Some people fear that the world’s faith—its power of believing in God—is about played out. If that were so, all the poetry would be gone out of the world, for men can’t make poetry without gods——” The glow came back to Michael’s heart, it seemed again possible that he should make these people understand him.—“Are there not signs in the Ireland of to-day of a bright future—of a new race of men—of the coming back of our undeveloped past ? The gods are getting into communication with men again—the great God with His legions of angels and saints, who are the lesser gods. You may hope that the thing will be done by religion ; or by art ; they are only different forms of the same thing—our struggle upwards to God, His struggle downwards to us ; our eternal need to get to God, and His eternal need to get to us. . . .”

“It’s mysticism he’s talking now,” a red-faced,

glistening-eyed woman, stout and stooping, whispered to her neighbour. "Mysticism."

"Ang?" the other uttered, bending towards her; inquisitive, lean, in dejected blacks and a sable necklet reeking of camphor tar.

"Mysticism. . . . He's talking mystic doctrines—allegories."

The woman in black nodded rapidly several times, shaking the fold of skin under her chin.

"He's a son of Quentin the publican," she said. The gross red-faced woman's face was suddenly vivified; the two looked at each other with understanding: they met on the common ground of physical gossip, and the red-faced woman, relieved, turned from the attempt to follow Michael's speech.

"You know yon big public-house at the corner of Mertoun and Buglass streets?" the black-dressed woman whispered bustlingly. "Yes—yes," she nodded, and the fold of discoloured skin hung more slackly for a moment. "It's funny to see the son coming out in this line. He was at the College here with my nephew."

"Indeed?" the red-faced woman said cordially; breathing asthmatically, sitting hunched up in her yellow coat and a toque of pheasant skins, bald here and there.

"He wasn't considered at all clever either," the black-dressed woman said with a roguish air. "And he was terribly faddy. Oh, it was just ivery fad under the sun, my nephew says; and off wi' the old fad on wi' the——"

"New," the red-faced woman suggested.

"Ay. . . . He wasn't just over popular among the lads by what my nephew says; he'd a queer sort of

manner, kind of, and kept hisself to hisself. . . . More money than he knows what to do with. . . . The father was one of the Quentins of Belfast and Dublin, the whisky people——” The black-dressed woman uttered a contemptuous little laugh. “And the mother was one of the Garries, the shortbread people, so she’d bring something.” As the black-dressed woman made the last statement her touch lacked sureness.

“Whisky and shortbread,” gurgled the red-faced woman, and they shook with laughter.

“He’s a house down at Fauldstane,” the black-dressed woman said.

“Indeed? I know Fauldstane very well—very well indeed, though it’s a good few years since I’ve been there.”

“You *don’t*!” the black-dressed woman exclaimed. “Now isn’t that strange? Isn’t it strange how you——”

“Come across people,” the red-faced woman offered.

“Ay.” The black-dressed woman nodded zestfully. “Well, I’ve never seen the house, but my nephew has. Kooogh! There was a lot about it in the papers at the time he was building it—some very smart verses about it in *The Mercury*. I must say I like *The Mercury*. It’s such a bright, chatty little paper to——”

“Take up. But what’s particular about the house?”

“It’s a daft-like thing,” the black-dressed woman said, bitterly contemptuous. She repelled the stare of a twisting indignant man on the bench in front of her. The red-faced woman, less gallantly hostile to the speaker, moved uneasily. “The house is at a corner where the top of yon road that runs down to the sea joins the main road,” the black-dressed woman

whispered. "It's new built and they say ivery room's a different colour. There's a rid room and a blue room and a yellow room and a pink room and one that's pure white. He'll need to wipe his shoes—ang? Kooogh! I suppose there's a heliotrope room, too."

At this jest the two women, cowering, shook with laughter. Two men turned with gasps of inarticulate protest. The black-dressed woman put a squeezed-up handkerchief to her mouth and eyes.

"Now you're behaving very badly," she said archly. She went on with a serious air: "He's a motor-car and a splendid big garden . . . grounds. Lots of the young ladies 'll have their eyes on him."

The red-faced woman's glistening eyes travelled about the room, noting the female faces and figures. With no obvious reason they paused, vaguely antagonistic in expression, on a young woman who sat on a front bench facing the right side of the platform.

For no obvious reason: for this woman had neither beauty nor the air of suggesting that she possessed it. She sat in rather a slouching loose-limbed way, and wore a black straw hat and a coat of mole fur over a frock of some thin palely-coloured stuff. Her fine eyes were gazing steadily towards the platform. . . . The red-faced woman's glance left her, returned to her.

"Who's *she*?" the red-faced woman whispered.

"It's Miss Morland," the woman in black said. "She's a gym. teacher. He—" slightly signifying Michael—"employs her in some sort of fancy night-classes he has for the poor Irish in the slums: she teaches them songs and games and so on: he pays her a good wage for it too, I believe. Fancy paying a woman to teach kiddies to play theirselves! Fooof! Hard enough to teach them to do their work, I'd think.

. . . She used to be a school-teacher, but she gave it up and went in for gym. when it first got to be so much the thing here. . . . Oh, she's not *that* young—no. . . . I've been thinking of joining one of her ladies' classes myself to see if it'll do anything for a digestive trouble I've got. . . ."

"May I ask if you're Irish?" the red-faced woman said humbly, after a mysterious linking of ideas.

The black-dressed woman smiled in a kind of annoyed derision, twisting her head sideways.

"No-o. My mother's Highland, so I suppose I've a right to call myself a Celt."

"I am Irish myself—partly," the red-faced woman said, propitiating.

"No, are you?" There was a generous surprise in the black-dressed woman's voice. "Now, I niver could tell from your speech—though there's something about the eyes . . ."

"I've lived in Glasgow since I was four years old," the red-faced woman said with a sigh, rippled by a foolish little laugh. . . . "I just saw one of the meetings advertised and came along to see what sort of thing it was. I've always taken an interest in anything occult."

The black-dressed woman nodded hurriedly, with no desire to know the meaning of the word.

"There's a kind of quickness in the Irish," she said. "A humourousness. It's what they call the Celtic Spirit. . . . We Scotch people as a rule are more slow and solid . . . more . . ."

"Reserved," the red-faced woman contributed. The other nodded repeatedly and vivaciously.

"Ay . . . we Scotch people don't say all we've got to say to strangers. We take longer to make friends

and we're more cautious about speaking out our minds . . . making remarks on folks . . . afraid of being hauled up for it. . . . Kooogh ! You can always rely on a Scotch body . . . hearty and homely. The Irish are more excitable—more treacherous in a way, I think. . . .”

The lean woman's noddings shook her speech into inarticulateness. Glances stole in her direction from the sitting people who represented the mercurial Irish nation.

“ I sometimes think that Ireland has been kept as she is—poor and ignorant and unsuccessful in material things—because she's been chosen for this mission,” Michael said, struggling physically to make his voice audible above the loudening talk in the benches, struggling mentally to break through the hard shells of indifference which isolated the minds of these people. “ To remind us the poetry in the world now is the voice of God that speaks to the outcast among people and nations. Perhaps prosperous and well-educated countries cannot be prayerful and simple : they lose the power to wonder and believe. Revelations were generally made to people who hadn't much to stand between them and eternity—not much material stuff nor intellectual stuff—nothing to stop their ears with dust or to harden their hearts with pride. The sham-rock lies close to the ground : it hasn't thorns like the rose—it can't wound like the thistle. Perhaps it's by reason of this humbleness that Ireland has been chosen as the place from which the light is to come again as it did in the old days. The light of faith and purity and love : the light in which we shall see, not only our countrymen but all our fellow-men, and shall recognise the truth that we are all parts of one another and that

we cannot wound a fellow-man without hurting ourselves and wronging God. . . .”

“He’s a blether,” the black-dressed woman said.

“Even the group of us here,” Michael continued, “can do much to keep alive in our hearts and in the lives of our poorer countrymen exiled here the image of the old Eire, the beloved of the gods, the archetype of nations ; we may do something—much—to restore a faith and interest in the things called supernatural—to fight against the deadening power of materialism—to bring back the knowledge and trust, the beauty and simplicity, of the times when the gods were not ashamed to eat with men and animals and the ‘good people’ had no fear of them.”

Michael’s face was lighted by the joy of his own thoughts : it seemed to him that they must be quite plain to at least some of those present. He stood, bending forwards, both hands on the table. There was a flash from a fine diamond on his finger and the two gossiping women looked at each other and nodded. Michael’s hair was of a bright yellow-brown. As he spoke a flush came into his face, the hues of his lips and eyes deepened : but a lock of the strongly coloured hair, straying on his forehead, emphasised a glazy blue-whiteness of skin which was, normally, characteristic of his whole face.

There was a murmur in a deep male voice of : “I should like to ask him——” Michael’s eyes flashed into those of the speaker, who blushed. He was a young man in blue serge and yellow boots. A saucy little smile peeped out from under the plump little dark moustache which, contrasting with the smooth pinkness of his cheeks, gave a suggestion of waxworks.

“Y—yes,” Michael faltered. “You want to ask

something, Mr. . . . ? Please do. Please all remember I don't want these meetings to be formal—more like talks between friends. . . .”

The young man's blush intensified and some nervousness mingled with the impudence of his smile.

“Cowie's my name,” he said. “Dr. Alexander Cowie.” He spoke slowly in his deep voice and with that air of claiming general attention which characterises the wit of a debating society. The people on the benches, half roused, were waiting.

“Well, Mr. Chairman,” the young man said, “I couldn't help wondering while I was listening to you—you'll excuse me putting the question and you'll understand, I hope, that it's put in no spirit of opposition . . .” Michael bowed solemnly, flushing at the flare of all those eyes, turned, with a sort of slow suddenness, on his face. They seemed to him like the eyes of reptiles, curious, yet half lethargic, coldly hostile. “Thanks,” Cowie said. “Well, Mr. Chairman, thinks I, listening to you—I wonder if the Chairman believes in fairies.”

There was a kind of jerk in the mental atmosphere of the room ; then an outburst of laughter.

“I don't know,” Michael said, angry and hurt. “Why shouldn't I ?” His eyes defied those of Cowie, which were full of a genuine amusement. “I suppose most of you here are Christians ?” Michael said. “You believe in angels ?”

“Well, with the ladies here I don't see how we can help ourselves,” Cowie said.

Loud laughter. Since the founding of the Eire Club the members had not been united by an impulse so vivid and so common. People, with shining eyes and open mouths, looked into the faces of

their neighbours, then leaned forward peering at Cowie.

"Oh, he's too comical!" the red-faced woman said. She added with a strange simpering consciousness: "He's a good-looking young fellow."

Racie Moore looked up sideways at Michael, just touched his elbow. Racie's lips suggested the word: "Patullo."

"Yes," Michael murmured defiantly. He faced Cowie, who had risen again to an accompaniment of expectant mirth.

"Excuse me, Mr. Chairman, may I ask another question?" There was a smirk on Cowie's rose-red lips under the toy-looking moustache.

"Certainly," Michael said in apprehension, his face whitening.

"Well, it's this, Mr. Chairman—if you'll excuse me and believe that the question is put in quite a friendly spirit. I couldn't help it arising in my mind while I was sitting listening to you speaking so eloquently about Ireland and about poverty and humility bringing us nearer to"—Cowie suddenly halted and, flushing, said in a lowered voice—"nearer to heaven. . . . I just dropped in about ten minutes ago and I may have taken you up quite wrongly."

"Please ask your question. I want to make the objects of the club quite clear to every one," Michael said. His intention was to make Cowie feel that he was ready to hear courteously anything that he had to say and was animated by a pleasant, chairman-like desire to put an end to his questioner's hesitation. But Michael's dread was increased by the note of roguishness in Cowie's tone. Michael felt certain from much dismal experience that he was going to be wounded;

and his voice winced and rasped. There was a movement of indignation in the benches at the tone that he was taking with this nice young man.

"Well, Mr. Chairman," Cowie said with a slow pompous enjoyment of his own articulateness, "I don't agree with you about poverty. I think we've too much poverty, and that so far from bringing us nearer to heaven it brings some of us nearer to the other place——" Cowie paused for a little applauding murmur to rise and fall. "However, that is not the point just now. I would like to know this: As Ireland is so poor and humble and as poverty and humility are such good things—why you don't go back to Ireland and be as poor and humble as you like?"

Through the clash and jangle of laughter, Michael was aware of Cowie's voice saying something else. The young man was still on his feet, blushing now and half penitent. . . . Michael, grave, stood waiting with a sick sensation till the noise was over. Racie, grave, sat with unuplifted lids. Old Patullo, pausing now and then to wipe his watering eyes, was scuffling paper. It occurred to Michael, composedly, that Patullo almost never laughed nor smiled.

"No doubt you've a good reason. I only thought I might ask," Cowie's voice came.

"Exactly," Michael said. "Not at all. As a matter of fact I gave my reason the first night we met."

"But I wasnie there," Cowie said quaintly; and the people laughed again, the black-dressed woman stifling a rapturous: "Oh, *isn't* he——!" in her ball of handkerchief.

"No?" Michael said, calm now. "We can discuss it another time. In the meantime I won't take up any more of the evening. Perhaps I've taken too long

already. . . .” The people stodgily refrained from contradiction and Michael faltered, “Uh!—I will now call upon Mr. Patullo to give us his paper on Terence O’Reilly, with whose poems”—Michael’s glance scuttered along the benches and in his voice there was a little crack which may have expressed mirth or desperation or both—“most of us are familiar. . . .”

Michael’s voice died away : he looked down into the red eyes of Thomas Patullo. Patullo had pulled the chairman’s elbow, he was saying something in a whisper, he was gesticulating, his look was of concern and appeal : but at first Michael could realise only the old man’s ugliness. There was something shameful to humanity in Patullo’s face thus upturned in the gas-light and seen in the frankness of an emotion.

Patullo said it all over again : the words came up floated on an odour of whisky. Racie was leaning over, whispering, frowning : his full face, with a line between his brows and his eyes wide open, was, by contrast to Patullo’s, of so refreshing a beauty that Michael felt grateful to his friend. Urged by signs from Racie, Michael tried to get the gist of Patullo’s murmurings.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Michael said pleadingly, “Mr. Patullo regrets he has left a portion of his manuscript at home. Only some quotations from O’Reilly, which Mr. Patullo tells me he meant to read at the end of the paper. So Mr. Patullo will just go on with the paper while I fetch the missing sheets. My motor is just at hand and I shan’t be absent more than twenty minutes.”

Old Patullo, after shaky searchings in his pockets, gave Michael a latch-key and a page from a diary with

his address scribbled upon it. The people in the benches exchanged glances as the young chairman made his announcement and left the platform. "Did you ever see anything as ill-managed as yon?" whispered the lean woman in the camphorated blacks. She bridled, definitely hostile, at the mention of the motor. Indeed there was a general feeling that this, like Michael's evening dress, was a solecism, an evidence of plutocratic pride. Even Cowie, recently so buoyant and self-rejoicing, stiffened into huffiness as if a thistle were sprouting inside him. There was giggling in the benches: some one coughed—with a hint of a jeer—as Michael vanished.

Michael went with a red face, trembling with shame and the anger that was in his heart. His disgust made it clear to him that these people were themselves ludicrous, that they were vulgar, pathetic in their pretensions; that in individual cases they were ugly and envious of his advantages. It was a well-known phenomenon of human nature that the vulgar, uneasy, tried to hide their fear by a yelling mockery, foolish and mirthless. . . . Michael did not succeed in consoling himself with these thoughts as he scurried down to the garage. Always there was the burning sense that he was mocked. It seemed to him that these people had wanted to be unkind. Why? What harm had he willed to them? The coming of Alexander Cowie with his blue suit and yellow boots and his self-delight seemed to Michael to complete the destruction of his hopes. The people's joy in Cowie was a deathly sign. He had not got hold of the right people for the Eire Club. Were there any right people to get? Anywhere? Michael's heart shrank from the dreary dread; from the cold mystery of these people's action

in becoming members. He tried to think of the simple, of the poor, and humble ; and there came a vision of the rooms in the East-end and the South-side of the city where he and his helpers assembled groups of their countrymen and countrywomen ; fed the people and read to them poetry and tales and taught the children the Erse language and Irish songs and dances. Michael visualised the rooms and the figures and faces ; the stupid twinkle that came into the eyes, the stupid smile on the mouths ; the ridicule which was the stronghold of stodginess. . . . One of the places was above a public-house, and the fruity odours, rising, were a cynical reminder of how Michael Quentin had got the money which he was using to remind the world that there were gods behind the door which parted earth from heaven and keys for the opening of the door. . . . Michael had engaged, at a handsome salary, as instructor in physical exercises, Miss Morland, recommended by Thomas Patullo. Not by Patullo alone, let it be understood ; for Miss Morland was teaching in several schools and possessed diplomas. Besides, Michael himself was not ignorant of these matters and knew that Miss Morland, though an Englishwoman, could dance a jig. . . . Racie came very faithfully to these meetings. In all of Michael's mental pictures of them Racie's figure seemed to preside ; still of profile with just that quiet glance from the corner of his eye when things were going too far ; profoundly cynical, patient. It intensified Michael's bitterness against these people that they had mocked him in Racie's presence.

The relief of mere physical escape was immense ; the rush of the car, the darkness of the violet night, the blurred golden lights. Michael's cheeks cooled ; even

his heart was a little less hot. He struggled with the idea of staying away and letting the members of the club go to their own peculiar lumpy devil. No : he was going back, he was going to finish the evening with conventional decency : he was going to show a quiet indifference to Cowie. He was positive that Cowie had not a drop of Irish blood in his body ! Michael felt that he had been foolish in not safeguarding the entrance to the club. Racie's fault with his wretched pessimism ! . . . How was Cowie to be got rid of ? Instinctively Michael recognised that Cowie represented the things most inimical to his ideal Eire Club ; and the traitorous hearts of the people held something that responded to Cowie, that delighted in Cowie—something, in fact, that *was* Cowie. Michael had had at the first meeting of Cowie's eyes with his a sense of closing struggle.

Tosh stopped the car.

"This is Twenty-three Lochaber Gardens, sir."

Michael got down. He was in a part of the city unknown to him. Tenements loomed on either side, softly massed in the mistiness of the night : Michael noticed with a dreamy wonder that the fronts of these buildings were of an almost unbroken darkness. The golden reflections of the street-lamps seemed to dive into the wet pavements. Between the blurred violet above and the glimmering slough of the street, the motor suggested some monster, in deep water, with shining eyes shooting out glances for prey.

Michael entered the "close," dusty, gaily tiled ; mounted the stairs, studying the brass-plates on the doors. Strange little houses, secrets to a man who lived among the well-to-do and studied the wretched ! Michael had no notion of what sort of rooms there were

behind those closed doors, nor of the kind of labour that supported those hidden families in their occult lives within. On each door there was a name-plate, little or large : in each there was a letter-box for messages of life and death : before each lay a mat, coir or coco-nut, with an anxious air of decency. The steps had an odour of pipeclay and were still damp from the washing of unseen hands. A gaslight burned half-heartedly on each landing. Through the open window on a landing came the voice of a cat—guttural, furious, exultant. Michael did not know in what sort of place the animal was wandering : his thought was that the cat had always remained a wild-hearted creature, a child of the Night and the Earth ; and, at the poignant cry, he had a vision of woods and waters, not at all of a neat little back-court with red ash on the paths and perhaps a fish-bone or two in the grass.

Reaching the topmost story, Michael found two doors fronting each other, neither of them bearing a name-plate. One of the doors was dusty and damaged with no mat in front of it, with a rough-edged hole in place of a letter-box, with iridescent hues on the unpolished brass of the bell and handle. The other, with its glittering brass and trim coir mat, had by contrast a smiling air.

Michael considered the torn diary-sheet, marked with the greasy imprint of the papillæ of Patullo's fingers, quaveringly scrawled with the number. Twenty-three no doubt. One of these two flats must be Patullo's ; and Michael concluded that an empty house lay behind the neglected door. He thrust the latch-key into the lock of the other.

The key went in briskly ; then stuck, and refused to turn or emerge. As he shook it, Michael heard a

swift, soft sound as of unshod feet on the floor. A match was scraped on emery—sc'rrpitz !

“ Who's there ? ” a voice said.

It might have been a child's voice, but Michael knew that it was a young woman's. It was high-pitched, gentle, rather frightened ; and it held a curious note of intense expectancy.

“ Does Mr. Patullo live here ? ” Michael asked. “ Excuse me. He gave me the key. I've come for a manuscript of his.”

“ Mr. Patullo is next door,” the voice said. It had descended now to the opening of the letter-box ; and as Michael bent to reply, he was suddenly conscious of the scent of a rose. It was as if a rose were unfolding just inside the door, as if the little flat were planted with brier-bushes for the bearing of a wonderful blossom of colour and perfume.

“ So sorry,” Michael said. “ I beg pardon. I thought the other flat was empty, and as Mr. Patullo certainly said twenty-three, and I'd looked at all the other doors——”

“ Yes.”

“ So sorry if I've alarmed you. Thank you.”

“ Not at all.”

For a few moments Michael remained, bending ; and the breath of the rose still came to him. Then, suddenly, there was a soft scuffle of feet moving away. Michael drew in his breath, inhaling the sweetness that lingered ; stood up straight with a quickly beating heart and shining staring eyes.

In Patullo's flat the flash of Michael's electric pocket lamp showed him the door of the parlour. Patullo had said that the manuscript sheets had been left on

the table in that room. The ray from the lantern falling on the painted boards in a corner showed rolls of dust that danced to the swing of the door. The little room had hotly red walls and was filled with pieces of furniture too large for the spaces and turned at all sorts of angles, suggesting to Michael's imagination a mass of floating, jostling wreckage. Above the chimney-piece was a cluster of little brown pictures—carbon-prints of the Pre-Raphaelites. Two rows of shelves overflowed with books mostly bound in paper. A red fire was dying in the grate: a brown earthenware spittoon stood on the tiled hearth, a breakfast-cup with dregs of tea beside it: the air was warm and fetid with lurking odours.

Michael bent over the papers on the table. This foul little house struck on his senses with the same shameful feeling of exposure as he had felt on looking into Patullo's face upturned in the gaslight. The room, with its medley of old furniture and books, with the exquisite handwriting of the manuscripts on the table, with the soft little pictures, the gross cuspidor and slovenly cup and saucer—the room was an expression of Thomas Patullo's personality as Michael saw it. It told of social descents, of miseries and humiliations, of the survival of a certain sensitiveness. . . . The old man had appeared out of his unknown life in response to Michael's advertisement. Patullo, at that first meeting, had talked a great deal about himself, about the little things in literature that he had done, about the people whom he knew, about the newspapers on which he had friends. Michael had paid little attention to these particulars at the time: but now, languidly, the scene came back to him; with the awkward group of persons interested in Celtic

literature assembled in Mrs. Wylie's dining-room ; with Patullo babbling, in the joy of having listeners ; with Racie sitting silent with downcast lids, patient, profoundly cynical. . . . Michael flushed as he bent over the littered table, searching. What concern of his was it if Patullo had descended through a succession of material and moral degradations, bringing with him as salvage a refined accent, a sensuous love of beauty, a knowledge of the classics ? A poor country-man was not to be received with suspicious questionings, but to be welcomed, borne with, helped. . . .

Let him find the papers and get out of this unmannerly dreaming in another man's house, out of this sickly physical atmosphere of tobacco and whisky, of tea and dirty draperies ; out of this sickly mental atmosphere of disgust ! It was a vile thing for a man to feel loathing of his less fortunate fellow-creatures. . . . Michael searched among the papers for those that Patullo had described. Everywhere there was an orderliness of detail in numbering and lettering ; and everywhere the whole was confusion, with the punctilious letters and numbers unaccountably appearing or failing to appear. It was as if a brilliantly methodical mind had been shattered into sparkling fragments which could not cohere. A list of Patullo's pupils, with the sum due to him from each, lay over a beautifully written fragment of Greek ; a set of test questions and an inventory of shirts and towels were pinned to a printed paragraph on herring fishing, signed " T. P. "

Suddenly, among the ruled papers, Michael turned up a sheet of notepaper, written on in a big, distinct, ungainly hand. The words on the sheet had jumped to his brain before he realised what he held. . . .

Hurriedly, shamefacedly, he hid the sheet and continued to search. . . .

“ . . . must know that there is no good in saying things of that sort to me. All that I can ever feel for a man or that any woman can feel for a man I felt long ago for you, and to talk to me of a settling-down with another man . . . ”

An old fellow like Patullo to be having an affair with a woman !—that was all that Michael permitted himself to think : he left the thought behind as he left the nauseating atmosphere of Patullo’s flat. What had he to do with the meaning of either ? With the manuscript in his hand Michael ran downstairs and jumped into the motor. He wanted to get this business over, to end up the weary evening at the club with all that he could assume of cheer and composure ; then to escape—to be free to think. The sleeping hours were coming, the hours of sweet follies, of thoughts that fled from the daylight. Nobody sneered at a dreamer lying dumb in the darkness : nobody could be even silently cynical of the secret things that one imagined, alone in the night—things as sweetly secret as the heart of a not yet unfolded rose.

When Michael came to town it was his habit to lodge with a Mrs. Wylie, a woman who was accustomed to him. Perhaps her way of regarding him was as a lodger rather than as a citizen : for it is a fact that she saw in Michael none of that eccentricity which was remarked, with resentment or amusement, by most of the people who were acquainted with him. Michael’s power of settling without a hesitation, without even a lifting of the brows, put him, in Mrs. Wylie’s esteem, into the class labelled “ gentry.” It had

never occurred to her that a gentleman could be ridiculous. Certain of his habits she noted and remembered and made the subject of conversation ; but this from a sense of duty, with respect, even admiringly. Thus, she had told the neighbours, and the members of her own family, of Michael's custom of taking a hot bath every evening before dinner ; of the fact that he changed, down to his very skin, every evening ; of the fact that his under-things were all of silk. He showed a quiet readiness in paying for all these luxuries ; and this, quite simply, from Mrs. Wylie's point of view, lifted them up out of the region of faddism, or side, or self-pampering, into the atmosphere of self-respect proper to one of the gentry. Considering Michael, Mrs. Wylie had no detailed memory of the public-houses at dusty corners, with their fruity odours and their lettering of " Quentin." Her consciousness was of the result of all these public-houses—of one of the results at least ; of Michael with his nice clothes and toilet articles, his white hands and unoccupied hours, his unsurpassed capacity for settling. The singular books and magazines that she saw in Michael's rooms and his various odd-looking callers—members of the societies which during the last two years he had been sampling—were accepted by Mrs. Wylie as evidences that the young man was educated. The young Wylies, cheerful oily engineers, who played banjos in the kitchen, might have been rebuked by their mother had they chosen their companions no better ; and they might have been chaffed by her had they worn turn-down collars like Michael's, or pitched their voices as high as his, or shown as nervous a " want of manner." But these things, derided by the independent members of the Eire Club, were lost to Mrs. Wylie in the dazzle

of her sense of Michael's perfect behaviour as a lodger and his splendid solvency.

Into this atmosphere of deference Michael came from the uneasy evening at the Eire Club, as he had come from so many other defeated efforts—with a battered sense of failure, with a burning desire to hide and forget. It was like stepping out of a crowded railway carriage, full of hostile contacts, on to the platform of a lonely country station. It brought, not the warmth of comfort, but the quietude of relief. Michael had told himself again and again, creeping thus into Mrs. Wylie's, that he must learn to be content with the lot of an outcast : then when his bruises healed he devised new plans for coming into close contact with his fellows. To-night he had longed to let this Eire Club, which was not *his* Eire Club, follow to the limbo into which the rest of his failures had been flung. . . . Patullo's paper, intolerably second-hand, pedantic, and irrelevant, had brought two or three members to their feet : they had spoken about anything except Terence O'Reilly's poetry.

The vile stodginess that sought to patronise a singer like O'Reilly ! The piteous cant about Irish superstition and Irish humour, the self-conscious smirking comparisons between Celtic animation and Saxon stolidity ! And always ignorance that Michael had formed the Eire Club for any reason save anecdotes and ghastly journalese ! There came the conviction that Patullo had not been sober and that Racie had known it . . . that the lean woman in black had known it too when she laughed.

Yet, since his return with Patullo's manuscript, Michael's thought of escape was no longer a mere jibbing, wincing desire to get away from certain things,

but a longing to get to one thing. A thing awaited him in the darkness, in the hours that are the dreamer's, when the scoffer's voice is silent and his eyes cannot behold. It was a thing elusive and mysterious and sweet like the perfume and the heart of a rose.

The sense of rest in Mrs. Wylie's rooms must soon be troubled by this eager desire. Michael ate because Mrs. Wylie had taken pains to keep the food hot and the wine cold. He even hesitated to go to bed because his nice landlady had obviously tried to make the dining-room pleasant with flowers and newspapers. But he went, leaving his letters unopened and one of the papers unfolded at the variety column.

In his bedroom, in the cool darkness, with the violet sky showing above the lowered window-sash, Michael suddenly recalled that parlour of Thomas Patullo. Michael had only a blind wonder about Patullo, a sense of waiting till some one should explain to him the incomprehensible creature. In flight from this memory, an evil monster of the darkness, the young man scraped a match-head on the emery of the box—sc'rrpitz ! And with the sound there came the sweet frightened high-pitched voice with that touching note of expectancy, and the shadowed room was filled with the scent of a rose.

“ Who's there ? ”

There was really a rose on his dressing-table, as Michael saw when he lighted the gas. He set the flower-glass by his bedside so that the wind, blowing in, might carry the perfume to him as he lay in the darkness. With every waft he heard again the sweet quivering voice :

“ Who's there ? ”

It might have been a child's voice, it was pitched so

high and inflected so guilelessly, it was so full of that eagerness of expectation. But Michael knew that it was a woman's. What was the meaning of that note in her voice? For what was her heart waiting? Michael had read a confusion of fairy-tales and legends, and now he had a vision of a Maeterlinck princess, captive and mournful-eyed, behind a tall thorny hedge of roses; calling across a dimming sunset-lit country—calling, calling, till another voice should answer . . . calling in a maiden's utmost need till a man should hear. . . .

People passed in the street under Michael's window. Footsteps going eastwards suddenly stopped, with a scurr on the asphalt, arresting feet that were passing westwards. A woman's voice exclaimed softly, in question: a man's replied; and Michael heard the footsteps again, falling side by side, passing away into the night.

He lay shuddering. The horror of the city, its awful matter-of-factness, seemed to be stretching ugly hands after him into that dim sunlit land of dreams. A woman's voice calling in her utmost need—and a man's answer! . . . Michael's heart struggled to escape, to recover the rapture of his dream. The horrible suggestive footsteps and voices were gone: the wind, blowing in gently from the violet darkness, again brought to him nothing but the scent of the half-unfolded red rose. Michael tried to keep awake so that that sweet thought might companion him: but, before his fancy could paint in the grey tower, the thorny barrier, and the blue hills from which the rescuer came riding, he fell asleep.

He awoke very early, as was natural in a man who had become accustomed to living in the country and

sensitive to the first quiver of dawn and the tunings of the birds. Michael came back to a consciousness that something pleasant had happened to him. Then he remembered what it was and groped among his dreams for some confirming memory of a meeting with the Maeterlinck princess of mournful eyes and tender expectant voice. Finding none, he went to the window and drew up the holland blind which was glowing faintly, artificially sunshiny in the first influx of light. There was a wood-yard opposite this bedroom window and beyond the brown and blond stacks and heaps, low and broken lines of buildings, so that Michael could see a stretch of sky. At first it was of a pearl-grey, then radiantly primrose-coloured : then the pink began to flow into it, with cloudings of crimson, with shinings of rose that was almost white. Michael imagined the great circle of which this was a segment, cut off clearly by the dark violet buildings. The circle was like a rose with rank on rank of petals, the colour mounting from the purple of the outermost, through notes of brighter and brighter pink, till it reached the gold-white dazzle of the heart. And in this intolerable splendour God was hidden : all the petals were, as Dante had dreamed and Doré drawn, composed of a great crowd of winged creatures whose happy faces, unwaveringly expectant, were bent towards the central mystery, the heart of the rose. . . .

When Michael began to feel cold he got back into bed. For a long time he sat with his hands clasped round his knees. His tints were all very pure, and the light, falling full on him, was repelled by no dead surfaces : nor must it crawl in any of those furrows which are the gutters of cares and vices. Yet there was a suggestion of pathos in Michael's appearance ;

something that strong people found attractive and the weak majority found absurd or even repellent. Poised on his long white neck his face seemed a rather narrow oval. The eyes, of a golden-brown colour, were prominent, vivid, with a hint of bluish fullness beneath them. The nose was short and straight, the mouth, large-lipped, was scarcely closed. The chin was rounded and cleft, the forehead of an admirable breadth, height, and placidity. Michael's hands and figure were those of a delicately nurtured young man who had never done any hard work nor gone in for outdoor games.

Presently he turned to the table by the bedside. The half-unfolded rose had loosened from its calyx and dropped : it lay, still in one crimson cone, on the dark wood and its reflection glowed up at it. Michael lifted the green stem, stared for a moment at the heart of the ruined rose. The little heart, hidden till the time of unfolding or the ravaging of ruin, was gold and white : it seemed to radiate light : it, too, was a mystery ; in it, too, God was hiding.

CHAPTER II

THE IMPRISONED PRINCESS

I

THERE was no butter in the house.

Mrs. Trathbye had known this since breakfast time : she had made up her mind then that they would just have to do without any : for she had resolved that she would never again buy the weekly two pounds of butter a day before the proper time. The proper time was Saturday, and to-day was only Friday. Very well. Let them suffer for having used too much butter : let them learn that they must draw in their horns ; that Mrs. Trathbye was not *made* of butter.

At breakfast and during the active morning hours Mrs. Trathbye was able to treat the matter with a certain lightness. She even made a joke to Aunt Caroline while she was scalding the empty butter-dish. But in the afternoon when Drusilla returned from the swimming-baths she despondently noted in her mother signs of ill-temper. Mrs. Trathbye became jarringly talkative on what was at best an exhausted subject.

No butter in the house ! Not even a morsel of jam, nor a bit of cheese, nor an egg. Mrs. Trathbye had given the last egg to Kathleen, poor child, at breakfast : she was doing her best but she could not make the eggs last the week. . . . It would not have been so bad if the bread had not been so stale. The poor girls would soon be coming in, tired and hungry. . . .

“ It’s no worse for them than for . . . you and

Aunt Carlie," Drusilla said, faltering on an inarticulate "me."

"I always think it's harder on a person that's been out working," Mrs. Trathbye said. There was a weight of meaning in her words, and Drusilla turned away, flushing.

"Ah then, I'm not saying it isn't hard enough for us all, child," Mrs. Trathbye said with a touch of contrition.

Drusilla eagerly hailed it.

"Mother," she said, "I may as well go and get the butter at Ackroyd's. Let me? I'll go before I take my things off."

Mrs. Trathbye hesitated.

"What difference does a day make?" Drusilla said, too urgent. Mrs. Trathbye became defensive, suspicious that her housekeeping was being treated as an easy thing about which she made an exaggerating fuss. She stuck to her resolution; and the effort absorbing all her moral force, she again became irresponsibly spiteful. Drusilla escaped.

In the bedroom the girl put on a dressing-gown, a faded thing but of a beautiful purplish-pink colour: she let down her hair, damp from the swimming-baths. Then she heard her sisters, Essie and Kathleen, come in, and again she rose to escape. There were only two bedrooms in the Trathbyes' flat and they were little narrow places. Drusilla and Essie slept in this one, Mrs. Trathbye and Kathleen in the other; while Aunt Caroline, who liked to be in an acknowledged discomfort, had a folding-bed in the parlour. Drusilla knew that both of the girls would come in here to take off their things and lay them on chairs or on the bed: she knew just how they would look in the glass, how

they would glance at her, how they would pass and re-pass her, jostling her with ostentatious "Excuse me's" with a wronged air of having been out earning money and of finding the house overcrowded when they came home. She knew that they would look shabby and clumsy in their cheap boots and ready-made costumes, and that Essie's face would be hot and shiny and gritty. If she spoke, smiling, they would not try to smile: they might not answer or they might contradict. . . . She knew, too, that there was a consciousness that would flash through them when they looked at their reflections in the glass, then at her sitting there. It was to escape from the presence of this thought that she fled.

She went into the kitchen and began to toast slices of the elderly white bread. Because of the heat Mrs. Trathbye was carrying the tea-things into the parlour. The open doors showed the faded green walls and the green linoleum on the floor, the half-soiled cloth on the table, the mustard-and-cress sponges hanging in the oriel window, spots of vivid translucent green.

Aunt Caroline was at the kitchen fireside, seated in an old rocking-chair, writing with her fountain-pen on some pages torn from an account book. She earned a little money by doing a woman's column for a Wicklow paper.

"Am I in your way?" Drusilla asked with a longing for humane speech.

Aunt Caroline did not reply.

"Am I in your way, Aunt Carlie?" Drusilla asked more crisply.

"I don't suppose you care whether you are or not," Aunt Carlie said morosely. She copied a statement about skirts from a London paper three months old,

then began to recall a recipe. "Is there a circumflex accent on 'cream' in French?" she asked with a sheepish reluctance.

"A grave accent, I think," Drusilla said.

"Oh, indeed!" Aunt Caroline said with a resentful slant of her head. She affected to meditate, then said: "I think I shall put a circumflex. . . . Why are you going about such a sight with your hair hanging down?"

Drusilla heard the question every swimming-day.

"It's damp," she said. "I was at the baths with Miss Morland."

"H'm," Aunt Caroline uttered: she made a ridiculous little motion of her shoulders, intended for a shrug, implying doubts of Miss Morland.

Mrs. Trathbye came into the kitchen: she looked at the fire-lit hair and said with a mingling of rebuke and derision:

"Take care you don't put any hairs in among the toast. It would be an improvement if you fastened up your hair when you're going where there's food."

"It's tied with a ribbon," Drusilla said coldly.

Then Essie came in.

"Have you been washing your hair?" she asked with an obvious assumption of surprise.

Drusilla stood up, the plate of toast in her hand.

"Now!" she said, with a defiant cheerfulness. She drew in a deep breath of air, expelled it, throwing back her head with a laughing mockery. She flung her beauty in the faces of these three hostile women. She pulled off the ribbon and her hair streamed, fire-illuminated, red-brown and golden, curling, over her broad shoulders: she put one hand behind her to catch the ends of the tresses and show that they fell

far below the girdle of the old gown. Drusilla's cheeks were petal-like in their bright pinkness flowing into whiteness.

For a moment the three women looked at her; Aunt Caroline stupidly malign, Essie angry; Mrs. Trathbye with a bright startled look of sympathy. Then the mother said:

"Come in to tea, children, such as it is. Essie, don't be wearing that dreadful 'No butter' face."

Mrs. Trathbye began to laugh; and, laughing, she was a charming woman, sweet, witty, and handsome.

It was just that lovable laugh of her mother's that made Drusilla feel guilty because she had arranged to go secretly that evening to Miss Morland's gymnastic class. If her mother had continued to be unpleasant Drusilla would have had the indemnifying sense of being driven into silence. But Mrs. Trathbye's gaiety lasted during the meal of tea and dry toast: she mocked the despondent Essie and Kathleen and made jokes about Aunt Caroline's long lean neck rising from a collarless red blouse.

"You're just like a hen at the poulterer's, Carlie," Mrs. Trathbye said. "Look at my beautiful neck." She put a hand on either side of her neck, turning her head quaintly. "Not one of you girls has a neck like mine," she said, her eyes passing Kathleen and Essie, glancing to Drusilla—"Nor a figure like mine." She drew down her hands, over the baggy black silk blouse that she wore, defining her wasted shape.

"No," Drusilla said with a gentleness of pity. It was as if the young woman that Mrs. Trathbye had been looked suddenly out of the past, pleading to be remembered, pleading her right to a place by Drusilla's

side and a heart beating in unison with hers, pleading forgetfulness of the long, careworn years each like a layer of earth on the grave of her beauty. . . .

After tea Essie pulled out the sewing-machine and began to work it. Aunt Caroline, with her passion for martyrdom, sat in the darkest corner of the draughty side of the room, writing her woman's column, holding the ragged account-book page on the cover of a book. Kathleen, who still wore her hair in a looped-up plait set with a big bow, was going about the room, searching in corners and opening and shutting the bookcase and cupboards.

"Dillie, where on earth did you put that library book?"

"Nowhere. I never saw it," Drusilla said, quickly on the defensive.

"Rubbish. . . . You must have put it somewhere. It would be more good-natured of you to say instead of keeping me poking about looking for it. I can't have all day to read the way you have. . . ."

"Ah, can't you tell her where you've put the book?" Aunt Caroline said, raising her head. "It isn't very easy for a person to write and she going on like that."

"As if I'd hidden the book!" Drusilla said, tears leaping to her eyes. "I believe you took it out with you and left it at the office."

"I didn't," Kathleen said. "I'm sure I didn't," she repeated with a quiver of doubt. Her office was a very quiet one; she spent hours daily sewing or reading, and was constantly carrying magazines and books to and fro. "I don't get so much time for reading, I'm sure," she muttered to cover her retreat, as she resigned herself to sitting down with an old number of *The Lady's Circle*.

Drusilla went into the kitchen, where Mrs. Trathbye was hauling up a squealing pulley from which dangled a row of stockings.

"Mother, let me do the tea-things," Drusilla said ; and the expected reply came :

"Ah, I'll do them in half the time myself."

Drusilla went into the bedroom to put on her coat and hat. Her gymnastic costume, acquired by many economies and deceptions, lay concealed at Miss Morland's house, whither she was going under pretext of a mere social evening. . . . Well, supposing she were acting falsely ! She said it to herself in a passion of desolate disgust. A lie was less demoralising than a train of little fizzlings, naggings, jeerings, offences. As she closed the door of the little flat, she said to herself, with a sense of wasted brilliance, that her home, full of competing women, was like a harem without its material luxury.

II

Grace Morland was lodged in two big rooms in a big, dark-grey, decadent house, one of a terrace in the west of Glasgow. The trees in front of it, dusty and already black-green, moved slowly in the rising wind. There was a sunken carriage-step before each door and the exuberantly designed iron railings, protecting a few feet of paved area, were broken into an outline almost like one of Nature's. A little surprised-looking maid guided Drusilla to Miss Morland's room.

"Oh, it's you—you're looking first-rate too," Grace said. "Find a chair—take the basket one, do ! Take off your things. We've time to have a cig. and

a comfy chat before we start. That's to say I suppose I'll have the cig. and we'll both have the chat."

Miss Morland spoke very loudly. Clad in her gymnastic costume she lay down in her deck-chair while Drusilla sat on a little stool opposite to her. The big room was fireless and growing dark, so that the little red pulse of Miss Morland's cigarette seemed a thing very vital. The wind mourned in the chimney: the room was heavily furnished and the old-fashioned mirror above the chimney-piece reflected the dull silvers and black-greys of the storm-boding sky. But Drusilla had a happy sense of adventure.

Miss Morland looked at her; and, with a subtle suggestion of defiance in her voice, asked:

"I say, how do you like me in this costume?" She stretched out her limbs, which were long and shapely.

"I've seen it before," Drusilla said, surprised. "It suits you very well," she added deferentially.

"*Doesn't* it?" Miss Morland said. "Isn't it a pity women can't always go about like this? Think how free we'd be! . . . It's coming, of course."

"I like skirts," Drusilla ventured, looking at her doubtfully.

"Oh, well, for indoors. Men like them—I never saw such a feminine person as you," Miss Morland said, suddenly indignant.

It occurred to Drusilla that she herself had said nothing about men; that she had not thought of men—Another thing that struck her was Grace Morland's habit of deliberately substituting the word "person" for "girl" when she referred to any woman who was young. The fact that Miss Morland obviously said "girl" naturally, and "person" with intention,

proved that she must *think* of Drusilla as a girl. It would have dismayed Drusilla to believe that she could really appear as a person to any one. Yet why should Miss Morland show this grudgingness in the use of the word "girl" in Drusilla's case, especially as she applied it freely to women who were her own contemporaries and plainly Drusilla's seniors . . . ? Drusilla mused, feeling worried.

"My dear, I *was* amused about your costume," Miss Morland said. "When you sent me that p.c. asking me to receive it here I thought I'd have a fit!"

"The truth is, Mother doesn't know I've joined your class," Drusilla said, vividly blushing and trying to laugh.

"My dear, of course I guessed that," Miss Morland chuckled. "The old lady would be shocked?"

"And Aunt Carlie and the girls would make a fuss," Drusilla said. . . . "Mother isn't old: she's very good-looking. . . . It's not exactly that they'd be shocked: but they—you'd need to live in our house to know how they *oppose* things—without any reason, just because I suggest them. . . . I think it's just a kind of habit from always having been kept living so close together. I don't believe Aunt Carlie, especially, knows when she's contradicting. And mother thinks you don't *need* anything—never to do anything or go anywhere. . . . I suppose I'm a coward, but what's the use of always having horrible little fusses?" Dejection had fallen upon her: her bright sense of adventure was quenched in shame. Seated on the little stool, she seemed like a child who gets hurt at the beginning of a day's pleasuring.

"Never mind, kiddie," Miss Morland said kindly. The words were out before she realised their motherly

tone, and she made as it were a clutch at their escaping forms. "A person has surely a right to take her pleasures as she chooses," she said. "A grown-up man wouldn't dream of being in subjection in these matters. Why should a woman?"

Drusilla was on the point of saying something about the expense: she stopped, again blushing, remembering how indelicate this would be to Miss Morland, who received the fees.

"Do you think it's wrong to do it in secret?" she asked.

Miss Morland was again surprised into looking touched, but recollected her policy towards Drusilla.

"How do I know any better than yourself?"

"Well, of course, you know more. . . ." Drusilla looked downcast. Miss Morland was not turning out as she had hoped. For years Drusilla had been hoping—always with a tinge of doubt—for the coming of the Woman Friend of whom one read in books. She was at once the background and the support of the Beautiful Girl, this Woman Friend; a creature not of necessity physically fair, but gracious, cultured, sincere. She was a certain number of years—say, eight to sixteen years—older than the Beautiful Girl, so that no sense of rivalry should defile the girl's worship of her social calm, the girl's acceptance of her moral and æsthetic dogmas. The Woman Friend had an exquisite selflessness—an opening of all her heart for the inpouring of one's sorrows: she had no personal moods. The illusion that she was playing the principal part was not hers: she stood with her gaze on the young friend in the fullness of the light. She had humour and taught one how to smile at bitter things. And her sweet wisdom, the quietening of her

pulses, were the results of something that had happened to her in the past—something that one surmised now and then when her sympathy grew so tender that it was almost sad. . . .

Something with a man in it. His voice broke bidding her farewell, his eyes overflowed, his hand shook. . . .

Drusilla had gone dreaming of this self-possessed, self-oblivious Woman Friend, experienced yet uncontaminated, enthusiastic without egotism; and, twice, had thought that she had found her. Now she feared that Miss Morland was going to be another disappointment. Grace had interested her at their first meeting at the baths a year ago: they had had many long talks in the cooling-room, lying on the red-and-white-striped couches in a laziness that felt itself pleasantly justified. True, Drusilla had noticed, almost at the beginning, that Miss Morland had some personal vanities and insincerities not to be found in the ideal Woman Friend of the mild novel. For example, Miss Morland's suggestion of her skill in swimming, given while she was lying on the couch, was not carried out by her actual performance in the pond; and Drusilla's knowledge of this awakened a kind of uneasiness as she listened to Miss Morland talking about her tennis, her hill-climbing, the poems she had made, and the tributes of various responsible persons to her elocutionary powers. Of her Swedish gymnastics and dancing Drusilla had as yet no doubt: for she knew that Miss Morland had given up teaching languages to go in for gymnastics as a profession; and Drusilla had an ignorant, awed respect for things done professionally, and particularly for the earning of money.

Miss Morland had encouraged her to read ; declaring herself amused that a person should have read so little and should avoid books that her mother found improper. If a person couldn't decide for herself—— ! Miss Morland lent books—iconoclastic little paper pamphlets which said that there should be no Church, and that kings, from the beginning of history, had been rascals ; problem novels ; Woman Suffrage and Food Reform magazines ; books on mental therapeutics and spiritualism. All these Drusilla read in secret with a leaping heart, with an exquisite sense of law-breaking. It needed only a little reading to show her that Miss Morland had merely rushed past all these subjects of which she only half consciously feigned a knowledge ; but because Drusilla was timid and humble, with an aching sense of her own ignorance, she remained in the position of a disciple and was actually learning something from Miss Morland. There was much to love in the woman ; especially a brusque protectiveness which was her natural attitude towards Drusilla. If she had let it have its way who knows how near their relationship might have come to an ideal friendship between a younger woman and an elder ? But sex rivalry came to vitiate it : Miss Morland struggled against the motherliness which would have cherished Drusilla, beautiful and softly helpless : Grace persisted in the assumption that they stood at the same stage of development. She did not pretend that she was as young as Drusilla, but feigned to feel that Drusilla was as old as she.

“ I'll go now and put on my gymnastic costume,” Drusilla said.

“ Yes, do. . . . What a prim way you have of

speaking ! ” Miss Morland said with her amused air. “ Why don’t you say ‘ gym. ’ ? ”

Drusilla coloured, a little resentful, and went in silence. Grace began to do a stooping exercise with a waste-paper basket loaded with books ; inhaling as she raised the basket above her head, exhaling as she lowered it. . . . Drusilla danced in blushing and laughing, in her blue tunic and long stockings. She stood in front of Grace, fidgeting with a sparkling gaucherie altogether charming, bowed, and spread out the scant skirts of her tunic.

“ Don’t I look lovely ? ” she asked.

“ . . . It shortens you very much,” Miss Morland said, with the startled sense, which came to many people sooner or later, of *how* lovely Drusilla looked. “ . . . But it’s very becoming,” she added, in an emollient tone. “ Get on your coat and we’ll go.”

At the gymnastic class Drusilla was radiantly in earnest ; wondering at the things that Miss Morland and the other girls could do, trying, with crimsoning cheeks, to leap and swing as they did ; playing hopping and ball-throwing games with a child’s seriousness.

“ I didn’t get enough of fun when I was a little girl,” Drusilla said, after the last exercises, looking into Miss Morland’s eyes, which, at the sight of her awkwardness, had become wholly friendly.

“ Didn’t you ? ” Miss Morland said. “ I had a very happy childhood—I was always a dreadful pickle——” She broke off and, loudly clapping her hands, called to the girls to wind up with a dance. But Drusilla already knew the stories of Miss Morland’s childhood in her father’s big country house in Lancashire—the

sort of childhood, Drusilla had often thought, that one read about in books.

Miss Morland played noisily and haltingly, breaking down every now and then. The girls, in their blue and white, hopped and slid irregularly about the long bare room, airy and pallidly tinted. Then they all crowded into the cloak-room, where there was a plunging into skirts, a changing of shoes, a riot of laughter and talk. Drusilla listened, in a wistful interest, for a time : then she managed to get into conversation with two girls. . . .

One of them was already looking at her in *that* way. The look fell blightingly on the bloom of her happiness. . . . She tried to get to the glass and peeped over heads and shoulders at her reflection, rose-cheeked and red-haired.

"I say !" Miss Morland said. (Almost everything that Miss Morland said was prefaced by that unnecessary statement : "I say !") "Are you ready ?"

They went out, scurrying across the asphalt playground. The school in which Miss Morland held her evening classes was in a poor semi-respectable part of the east of the city—a place of remnant-shops and pawnbrokers, of fried-fish shops, of littered closes and streets, of a surplus of little children with dirty faces, foul mouths, and innocent eyes. A large percentage of the population was Irish, and their names of Quinn, MacNulty, O'Brien, and the rest shone over their shops and public-houses while their children on the pavements spoke a mongrel language.

As the two girls went by, the young men, grouped at the corners, uttered chaff : their eyes passed Grace to dwell on Drusilla's rosiness ; and the more gifted

of them saluted her with such phrases as : " Hullo, wee Jeanie ! " or " Cherry Ripe ! "

" I say ! " Miss Morland said, suddenly stopping in her long-stepped, stooping walk. " I say—I wonder would you mind ? I want to go up to Michael Quentin's club-rooms in Groome Street with a message. I say, I wonder would you mind ? I'd thought of going up to-morrow, but to-night we're so close to the place. . . . Perhaps we'd better just take that car ? " Miss Morland began to run towards the car station, stopped, looked questioningly at Drusilla ; began to run again and replied to a gesture of the guard's ; then stopped.

" It's a pity not just to go up when we're so near."

The guard made a motion of inquiry : then all the lines of his face and figure seemed to drop downwards in disgust—and he violently rang his bell. The car moved on and Miss Morland, after a vague little run in its wake, turned and strode up a side street.

" We'll just go—better just to go and get it over," she said to Drusilla, scurrying along beside her. " I always believe in knowing what you want to do and doing a thing right away."

Groome Street, narrow, with yellow flares of light and black shadows, full of people, of fruit-barrows and hot potato machines, gave an impression of brawling life. Men and boys wearing green tweed caps and women in tartan or fawn-coloured shawls debouched from the public-houses ; for it was almost closing time.

" I say, you don't mind running a little, do you ? " Miss Morland panted. " They usually go on till quite ten, but Michael Quentin may be gone." . . . Miss Morland was in a breathless state and could not keep up with Drusilla.

"That's a thing I'm not good at. I don't know how it is. Anything else in the athletic line. . . ."

They entered a close and mounted hollow-stepped stairs. People coming down passed them. On the first landing an open doorway flooded out light and odours of lemonade and bananas : within there was a jabber of voices, the sound of a banjo hopping along to an ambling pianoforte accompaniment. A man began to sing :

*"What is it sets you a-dreaming, a-dreaming,
Under the moon—under the moon—
When the yellow gals on the floor of the barn
Are dancing in tune, dancing in tune—
And each of them dear little yellow gals
In the arms of a coon !"*

A number of voices repeated appreciatively : "A coon !" and there was an outbreak of laughter and applause. Drusilla held Grace's arm to stay her, and they stood and listened.

To Drusilla the whole incident was an exquisite adventure. She felt admiration for Miss Morland, who carelessly went here and there in the city—even at ten o'clock !—calling on men, not even in houses, but in strange places such as offices, studios, and club-rooms. The nearness of a crowd always excited Drusilla ; especially when the crowd was made up of people whose lives were strange to her ; and as the great mass of the city lay unknown around her, romance pulsed for her in the blocks of buildings and the silent comings and goings of the streets. Now she was wrought upon by the male voice singing alone, by the volume of sound when the audience all shouted

together. When the song was ended and Grace led her into the room, Drusilla's face was alight with these emotions ; and it kept the heightened hues of the gymnastics and the rush through the damp windy night.

Thus she came before Michael's eyes. He himself never doubted that it was the will of God. Nothing was more apparent to him than that she was the work of God ; that God had fashioned her with the same love as he used in the making of a flower. As she stood by Grace—who was talking to Racie Moore—it seemed to Michael that the faces and forms about her were blurred into a mass, so that she shone out like a single rose blooming in a desolated garden. . . . Michael, staring, came slowly down the room ; almost in fear that the nearer he came the more would she fade from the bright fulfilment of his ideal.

But the nearer he came the more beautiful he saw her. Miss Morland introduced him and he stood silent while Racie spoke a little. No use in Racie glancing at him with that eye-corner look of his which hinted : " Better say something. Better not stare at the girl." Michael knew that he had a right to look and that speech was unnecessary. . . . Her cheeks were like the petals of a wild rose, the clear vivid pink washing into a white as clear. Her mouth—oh, the simile had been done to death, but to what but a cherry could you liken a mouth lipped so fully and silkenly, so redly coloured, so soft and small ? Her eyes had the red-brown tints of rose-tree twigs and thorns. Her red hair was a wonderful criss-cross of brights and darks under her wide-brimmed hat ; hair so beautifully negligent in its puffing and piling that in an instant Michael knew just how, loosened, it would stream and

fall. He knew, too, that it was chiefly from it that there came a sweetness that was like the breath of a rose.

Miss Morland, in a slow kind of shout, opened her business with Michael ; and while she was talking to him, Racie answered Drusilla's shy questions about the Eire Club. It was interesting to see the actual bare-floored room where Michael Quentin was trying to get into touch with his poor country-people ; and to see the poor country-people larking about among the bare benches, eating stray bananas and oranges, drinking lemonade, lighting pipes and cigarettes, winding mufflers and shawls about themselves and their children, trudging to the door with : " Good night, then, Mr. Quentin. Good night, Mr. Moore."

Drusilla was not intimate with any young man : she had a brother and several cousins in Ireland ; and, at the dancing-class which she had attended some years earlier with Essie and Kathleen, she had become fleetingly familiar with two or three boys of her own age. But the Trathbyes' house was pre-eminently a feminine household, and any relationship with men did not go past shy gratified beginnings. Drusilla was vivified by the thought that Michael and Racie were both young well-dressed *nice* men. Their quietude was emphasised by the roughness of the poor fellow-countrymen and by Miss Morland's bawling speech, the jolting, jerking vivacity which she practised to—— Why did Grace practise a jolting, jerking vivacity ? Drusilla put the question aside for later asking.

" Then you are interested in Celtic literature, Miss Trathbye ? " Racie was asking with his faint smile.

Drusilla told him of some of the things that she had read, and that she was Irish too.

"So I was afraid," Racie said. "Afraid for your own sake, I mean. It's a frightful misfortune. Mr. Quentin enjoys it because he's only half Irish : he has an absurd notion of Ireland that he got in his childhood from affected Celtic dramas and tales. He's been to Ireland, of course ; but landing at Belfast in a drizzle and being cheated at dirty Western inns makes no difference to a man who's an illusionist : he keeps the dream and defies the reality. . . . Not that it matters much. Anything does as an outlet for romance and it's romance that's the essential part of him, not Irishism—or is it Irishness or Ire ? . . . If it hadn't been the Celtic Renaissance, it would have been a scheme to make Scotland truly national by thatching all the roofs with porridge ; or an effort to arouse the American Indians to drive out the invaders with their coloured quills and impassioned poems ; or he might have written a book about the play of colours on icebergs and the moral effects on the Laplanders. Poor old Ireland just happened to be the flower on which the bee from his bonnet has settled for the time."

"You are an Irishman, aren't you ?" Drusilla asked.

"Dublin," Racie said, suddenly grave, with a touch of pride. "I went in for 'literature.' I got a position on *The Glasgow Evening Mercury* by answering an advertisement. The puzzle is to find the connection between Literature and the *Mercury*."

He drawled with a weary air, and Drusilla, intrigued by his inexpressive face, stood, a smile hesitating on her lips. She was aware that Grace, getting into conversation with a woman and child, had parted from

Michael, who had drawn nearer to Racie. She noticed the brightness of Michael's smile to his friend.

Racie's fear was that Michael would ask Miss Trathbye to come to the meetings of the Eire Club : he went on, chaffing, trying to prevent an exhibition of Michael's ridiculous earnestness.

"Patriotism does as well as any other illusion, especially when one's away from home. I know a fellow who has a very high ideal of filial duty : it's because he's an orphan."

"Don't mind him, Miss Trathbye," Michael said, astonished at his own ease in addressing her. "He'll have it that no real Irishman has faith in Ireland."

"Well, my mother's a real Irishwoman," Drusilla said in her shy childish way of speaking. "And she's always saying that everything in Ireland is better and nicer than here."

"May I ask how long your mother has lived out of Ireland ?" Racie said.

"Oh, a long time—nearly all my life," Drusilla told him.

"Ah !" Racie said.

Drusilla, flushing, laughed ; and Michael Quentin, saying again : "Don't mind him," laughed too. There came to him moods of joy, of a confidence in life as a triumph of friendship, of youth and banter, of shared enthusiasms.

The hall was nearly empty now, and they were moving to the door : in her embarrassment, troubled by the sphinx-like calm of Racie's face, the girl drifted towards Michael.

"Mrs. MacNulty has a lot to say to Miss Morland, surely," Racie said with the throaty utterance that sometimes took him unawares.

"Oh, Miss Morland takes a great interest in that kid," Michael said. "She's very fond of children— isn't she, Miss Trathbye?"

Drusilla was not fond of children: she felt vaguely that Michael might consider the love of them an ideal attribute.

"I don't know," she said. "We haven't been friends very long." She wondered why Michael looked pleased; then wondered why she had felt a wish to be regarded as Miss Trathbye rather than as Miss Morland's friend.

"The kid's an orphan," Racie put in in his quiet voice. "Miss Morland has been very kind to him. She's awfully kind, Miss Morland."

"Awfully kind," Michael repeated.

"Very generous," Racie said.

Did these young men quite like Grace? . . . Did she herself quite—? Drusilla gazed at the group of three—the wide-mouthed woman, shawled, the brown-haired boy of five, Miss Morland, tall, in her loose grey coat, a green woollen cap on the black hair which was already lined with grey. She was saying good night to the woman and child now; and suddenly she caught the boy in her arms and held him close with his face hidden in her neck. . . . Leaving the hall, she turned to wave to the shawled woman and her gaze lingered. . . . Grace had fine eyes, with irises of an admirable violet and porcelain-like whites. Looking now into them, dark in the paleness of Grace's face, Drusilla surprised a terrible look of suffering such as comes for a deathly thing done or a vital thing left undone.

Something in Miss Morland's past? Something with a man in it? His voice broke bidding her farewell, his eyes overflowed, his hand shook. . . .

They were in the street now, Drusilla's shyness keeping her in shelter by Michael, who was not so handsome nor so sarcastic as his friend.

"D-do you go on the subway?" Michael asked with a stumbling eagerness.

"Sometimes," Drusilla replied solemnly. "But I like the car best."

"Do come on the car," Michael said. "Do you live near Miss Morland?" He was hoping that the two girls dwelt many miles apart.

Behind them Racie—who had none of the sustained conversational brilliancy that Drusilla feared in him—was asking Grace if she went on the subway. . . . The four of them mounted to the roof of a car and Michael bought tickets. The car began to move westwards through a web of golden lights. Michael saw Drusilla's face fitfully illumed and shadowed. Always there was the wonder that a thing so beautiful should endure for the returning of his gaze.

Racie and Miss Morland had risen and were stumbling towards them: they went down the stair, swayed this way and that by the swinging of the car. At the corner where Drusilla's homeward way parted from Grace's they stood and talked; Grace ostentatiously familiar with the young men, calling them "you boys," using their abbreviated names. Drusilla listened to all this with wonder. Should she ever call young men, not blood relations, by such diminutives as "Racie" and "Mick"?

Grace's check-key chuckled in the lock, her "Good night!" and the slam of the door startled the stillness of the long row of house-fronts, half obliterated by the mass of trees mourning in the wind. Michael and Racie, with Drusilla between

them, walked on in a direction that Michael already knew.

They mounted the slightly sloping street under a dark blue sky, with high indigo blocks of buildings on either side. The street lamps showed, blurred golden, veiled in the misty blueness. The sound of traffic came faintly from wider streets behind them, still pulsing and flowing with the passion of the city's life.

Racie looked inquiringly at Michael, who paused at Number Twenty-three.

"Yes, it's here," Drusilla said.

"You're next door to Mr. Patullo," Racie informed her.

Drusilla did not deny it.

"I don't suppose you know him?" Racie said, as if the suggestion of such a thing were an impertinence. "He's the treasurer of the Eire."

"I know him just by sight," Drusilla said. Racie was already condemning his own heedlessness in again mentioning the Eire Club. But the good-nights were said without Michael asking Drusilla to join.

Drusilla had no key. She clicked the letter-box and rang the bell; and was answered by a wrathful sniff inside the house and the dragging of reluctant feet. The door was jerked open, and Aunt Caroline, in a blue and black dressing-gown and with rubber curlers in her hair, could be seen flouncing into the parlour. Drusilla frantically closed the door.

"Where on earth have you been?" Aunt Caroline exclaimed, then sank into mutterings. . . . "A nice hour of the night—near twelve—might remember others have got to get up in the morning and go out to work. We all can't . . ."

"Nonsense. It's not eleven yet. You've no right to tell untruths," Drusilla said.

She was amazed at her own spirit. And Aunt Caroline, as if amazed too and acquiescing in something changed, shuffled back to her chair-bed without even mentioning the chaining of the hall-door.

Michael and Racie, in silence, walked to Mrs. Wylie's door.

"Isn't it a beautiful night?" Michael said. . . .
"Lovely."

Racie looked at his shining eyes, smiled faintly, and went. . . . After all, Michael Quentin had money he could afford to make a fool of himself.

III

Drusilla remembered that she had been smoking : cachous occurred to her as a means of deceiving her family. She looked about, saw a chemist's shop, and entered. Dr. Alexander Cowie came from the back of the shop.

Drusilla had met Cowie five times at the five meetings of the Eire Club which she had attended during the months of June and July. It became impossible to buy cachous.

"My consulting-rooms are here, you know," Cowie explained, "and Mr. Barrowman's away for tea, so I'm rushing into the breach." He smiled socially with an air of being ready for a talk. His expression was habitually self-confident, yet Drusilla noticed for the first time an emotional modesty in him. He had coloured a little, though the thunderous July weather had faded the pink in his cheeks, and his eyes were rather shy and (she thought) very pretty. They were

like a doll's eyes, with their round blue-grey irises and the thick dark lash-fringe above and below them. She sought something to say.

"There was rather a small attendance on Thursday, wasn't there?"

"Oh, you know, Miss Trathbye," Cowie said, "it's a mistake to have the meetings so far into the summer when the evenings are long and light. People want to be out enjoying themselves." Cowie put a suggestion of roguishness into his tone and Drusilla smiled.

"I think it's rather a pity always to drop things in the summer," she said. "There are such a lot of empty evenings. . . ." Her voice faded away as she thought that she was exposing the dullness and poverty at home: it was abominable not to have friends and resources like other people.

But Cowie was looking at her rather strangely, with a kind of eagerness and pleasure. She had an impression that he checked something that he was about to utter; then he said:

"That is so, no doubt. But every one doesn't think as you do, Miss Trathbye. There's very few that take a real interest in littery matters. . . ." A boy came in to buy a bottle of iron tonic and Cowie served him, after some searching and doubtful conjectures about the chemist's prices. "Barrowman's an old school chum of mine," Cowie explained to Drusilla. "He and I were at school together: he's rather struggling but a thoroughly good fellow, and my best friend." Cowie, with his slow pompous manner of utterance and his deep voice, had an air of conferring a diploma on Barrowman by this speech.

Drusilla, interested, looked round the meagrely stocked little shop. Since their first meeting she had

thought of Cowie as a rather piquant creature. He was a doctor, just beginning practice, he had told her, and he was quite unlike her idea of a doctor—quite unlike the two other doctors that she knew. Cowie seemed to Drusilla to have passed through his university life without absorbing any sort of culture ; and this surprised her very much for, in her uneducated state, she thought of culture as the necessary accompaniment of education. It was puzzling that Cowie should speak as he did ; and puzzling, but admirable and quaint, that he should be so utterly contented with himself, with his lot, with his friends. If Drusilla had been offered a wish by a suddenly appearing fairy, she would probably have spoken, without a moment's sounding of the depths of her heart, the thought that lay constantly near to the surface : " Let me get away ! " *To* what, was vague : *from* what was definite and sure. It was singular that Cowie, apparently so young and vital, should feel neither yearning nor disgust.

This was one of the thoughts that Drusilla had about Alexander Cowie. Others were that he was seemingly sociable and popular, that he (probably) lived in a little flat or cottage, that his people were (probably) " rather awful " ; also that he was good-looking and dressy with a common smartness and trimness. But the truth is Drusilla had thought very little about him and would have thought less had not the human lives familiar to her been so few. Cowie's commonness, his unashamedness, put him outside of the clique of persons whom the Trathbys considered their equals. Mrs. Trathbye would not have taken Cowie seriously as an acquaintance ; and neither did Drusilla take him quite seriously. He was a mongrel

kind of doctor, whose consulting-room was at the back of a chemist's shop, and whose dress was not that of a doctor but of a typical Glasgow "Johnnie"—one of those young men who "swanked" on the pavements and in the tea-rooms of Sauchiehall Street and Buchanan Street.

"I don't think, you know," Cowie said, "that Quentin's quite a success as Chairman. You want a go-ahead man with bright ideas for a thing like a littery."

"Mr. Quentin doesn't want the Eire Club to be an ordinary literary club," Drusilla objected.

"That's so, of course," Cowie said mechanically, and went on as if she had not spoken. "People go to a littery to be livened up, not to be put to sleep. That paper we had on Thursday, for instance—yon's not the sort of thing to take, you know. I wonder Moore doesn't take the thing in hand himself."

"Mr. Moore?"

"Yes. He's on *The Mercury*, you know," Cowie said with an important air. "Very quiet chap, but I'd think he must have more practical go-ahead ideas than Quentin."

Drusilla felt angry and contemptuous. *The Mercury!*

"But the Eire Club's for Irish people," she said. "It's to study Celtic literature."

"Oh, he'll never make anything of that," Cowie said undisturbed. "He'd be better to keep an open door. No one could be more interested than I am in the Celtic spirit," he added with his air of solemn propriety. "It gets closer to Nature than the Sassenach can: I'm a bit of a Celt myself: one of my grandmothers was a Ross-shire woman. . . . But an ideal littery

ought to aim at combining the Celtic animation with the more solid qualities. . . . Quentin's too much of an autocrat. Mind you, I'm not a Socialist ; I've no sympathy with sentimental talk about equality. A strong man is the man that's *got* to lead. But Quentin isn't a strong man : he'd be better to listen to the opinions of a committee."

Drusilla had come to understand something of what was happening to the Eire Club : she shared Michael's sense that the club was being taken from him with a slow sureness, and altered to the club of Alexander Cowie. Cowie, who had "dropped in" at the club at a casual word of a friend, and come again because the evening of meeting was more convenient to him than that of his own "church littery" ! Cowie was dominating by virtue of his power of supplying what the other members expected. And this mysterious thing was happening while Michael and Drusilla watched.

"Well, he founded the club and it's his money," Drusilla attempted.

"That's just it," Cowie said with a triumphant air. "Folks like Quentin always think you can do anything with money. You can't."

Drusilla, in her annoyance, had opened a glass case on the counter, and begun to compare tooth-brushes. She looked up, arrested by the dominance in Cowie's tone. She was struck by a suggestion of power in him. What was it ? She tried to determine if the fresh softness of his cheeks and lips, the dewiness of his eyes, were simply the painting of youth and health and happiness on forms that were in reality strong and harsh. But like most people she found it difficult to distinguish lines from hues.

"Beg pardon, were you wanting one of those ?"

Cowie said. He bent over the counter and for a moment their heads were rather close together. Drusilla heard Cowie utter a sniff, and she quickly drew back.

"Yes," she said, "I'm forgetting it's after four o'clock and I must get home. I'm to bring something for tea." She laughed, as people do when speaking of household things which they treat with the utmost solemnity. Cowie was still slowly examining the tooth-brushes, his red underlip projecting and a frown drawing his brows together. Suddenly he looked up and asked abruptly :

"Do you see much of Miss Morland, Miss Trath-bye?"

"I've just been to see her," Drusilla answered with another uneasy laugh.

"So I thought," Cowie said dryly. He held out the bunch of tooth-brushes. "That's rather a nice one? Do you want it hard or soft? Barrowman ought to leave the prices marked on things when he goes away to his tea. . . . I say, don't you learn anything from Miss Morland?"

"Learn? . . ." Drusilla faltered.

"Yes. She's been teaching you to smoke, hasn't she? . . . She won't teach you anything that's nice."

Drusilla's eyes flashed into Cowie's flushing face: the blood, always vividly in evidence in her cheeks, surged up her temples and brow. . . . Cowie still awkwardly held the tooth-brushes. It was as if prompted by a nice dramatic instinct that Barrowman entered the shop at this moment.

"I don't know what right. . . ." Drusilla was muttering, not knowing what more she was going to say. She selected a soft, black-haired brush, a thing

she detested. Eagerly, with a vindictive snobbish sense of forcing Cowie into the position proper to him, she offered him ninepence. Cowie made a gesture towards Barrowman, who took the money.

Drusilla, with a sense of defeat, bowed and left the shop. She hurried into a baker's and bought some crumpets. As she walked on, her anger, which was half embarrassment, subsided, and she even smiled. Cowie's rebuke had made an appeal to her femininity : she felt vaguely that it was a kind of compliment. She began to imagine little developments of the scene—things that might have happened, that might have been done and said if Barrowman had not come back. Cowie's speech had been a stimulating surprise : she sent her memory back and found that she could remember, almost exactly, each occasion on which she had seen Cowie, and how he had looked and what he had said. . . . And her thoughts refused to stay with him but went to Michael Quentin.

Alexander Cowie ! He was simply an impertinent chemist. A suggestion of the counter clung about him—about his clothes and boots and moustache. Even his rose-coloured cheeks and the soft shining of his eyes had something cheap and showy. But Michael Quentin——

Drusilla found that she had no precise neutral record of her few talks with Michael. He had slid into her life quietly : it already seemed natural to believe that he had always been there. Had he not indeed always been there—a dimly formed ideal which had fed the hunger of her heart ? Not like other men—not like any one else. She felt that she did not need to explain herself to him. She had a complete faith in his kindness : he did not excite nor frighten nor intrigue her

as other people did. Her heart rested contentedly on the thought of him. . . .

"Miss Trathbye !"

It was Cowie running after her. He made up on her, panting, forgetting to lift his hat. Drusilla walked along beside him, not looking at him.

"Miss Trathbye, I suppose I've offended you," Cowie said indignantly. . . . "I suppose you think I'd no business to say that ?"

"I was surprised," Drusilla said coldly. A silence followed, and she knew that she would hold a stronger position if she said nothing : but a curious and apparently disproportionate excitement urged her into speech.

"It wasn't a nice way to speak about a lady," she said, tremulously squeezing the bag of crumpets. "And it was ridiculous, of course. . . . Still, that has nothing to do with it. You don't know me, you're practically a stranger. . . ."

"I know what I'm talking about," Cowie said almost violently. "Miss Morland—well, I'm saying nothing against Miss Morland—but she isn't your sort."

"How do you know what my 'sort' is ?" Drusilla asked, an involuntary little quaver of laughter in her voice.

"I've eyes in my head," Cowie retorted. He was rough, vulgar, almost brutal : the arch gallantry of the literary society wit and ladies' man was gone from him. "I'm saying nothing against Miss Morland, mind : she can do as she pleases : but you're different."

"You mean *I* can't do as *I* please ?" Drusilla rippled.

Cowie glanced at her unsmilingly.

"I mean you're different from Miss Morland," he

said. "She can do as she likes. But you're younger and . . ." Cowie's voice died away into an uncharacteristic mutter.

"I don't see what my age has got to do with it," Drusilla said, with a base sort of pleasure in his other meaning that she guessed.

"You're—more attractive," Cowie said grudgingly. "At least to some people. I don't mean you're obviously attractive to the man in the street."

Drusilla felt angry : she did not search for the exact reason, but told herself again that Cowie was impertinent.

"Suppose we leave my personal appearance out of the conversation," she said.

"Oh, beg pardon. Beg pardon, I'm sure," Cowie said huffily. They walked without speech for a few minutes ; then he spoke in a different tone :

"I suppose it's kindness makes you take up with her. I think you could not be anything but gentle and kind. . . ."

"What nonsense !" Drusilla said in a touched surprise : for he spoke earnestly and his face had flushed. "If there's any kindness I suppose it's on her side."

"Oh, I *say* !" Cowie exclaimed.

"Well, it is—in a way. She knows far more about things than I do : her life's far fuller. She has ever so many more friends . . ."

"Oh, I say !" Cowie repeated ; with a reverent sort of amusement as if at a beautiful innocence.

"Who told you she'd such a lot of friends ?"

"She did herself," Drusilla replied crushingly.

Cowie laughed loudly in an irritating way ; and Drusilla again reminded herself of that great social gulf

between them. . . . It was rather an enfeebling thing to find that Cowie had absolutely no consciousness of the gulf's existence.

"When folks have lots of friends they don't go about bragging about it," Cowie said.

Drusilla felt the truth of this and the sudden searching flash which it turned on Grace's case. Drusilla rebelled against the cruelty of it—undeserving Respectability's harshness to the outcast and the questionable.

"Suppose she *has* no friends?" Drusilla broke out. She was beginning to see that she had been too credulous of Miss Morland, but was hardly aware of, or willing to admit, the extent of the delusion.

"It's nothing against a person to have no friends," she went on with cheeks aflush. "Some of the best and greatest people who have ever been on the earth have been friendless."

"Who?" Cowie inquired.

There was a silence. Drusilla could not think of any examples.

"Shelley," she suggested presently.

"I don't admit Shelley was a good man," Cowie said. "Have you read his life?"

"No . . . but . . ."

"I'm glad you haven't," Cowie said, smiling. The patronage of the smile was exasperating, but it contained something bright and tender—something that allured her. She thought again that Cowie was good-looking with pretty eyes.

"I don't mean that Miss Morland comes into the same category as Shelley," he said.

"No?" Drusilla uttered, ironical.

"No," Cowie said solemnly, as if much depended on his judgments. "Miss Morland's all right as far as I know: only she's not your sort. She's a bit fast. I don't approve of ladies smoking and wearing dresses that show their limbs."

"Do you approve of them having limbs?" Drusilla asked. Cowie disregarded her.

"Those militant suffragettes . . ." he said.

"Oh, I thought we'd get to that!" Drusilla exclaimed. "Miss Morland is a suffragette, but she isn't militant. She'd be glorious if she were. She'd be glorious if she did anything with her whole heart."

Cowie looked at her, sideways, with a strange, shy look.

"Suppose a woman did something else with her whole heart—would you think that worth while, Miss Trathbye?"

Even in his awkwardness Cowie kept the pompous utterance of the church literary society. His deep voice, with the rising inflection, reminded Drusilla of his inevitable "Mr. Chairman?" and the giggles of his female admirers at the club.

"What sort of thing?" she asked laughingly.

"Suppose she were to give her whole heart—to loving a man," Cowie faltered. . . . "Would you call that glorious?"

"Yes!" Drusilla said, with a kind of grave triumph.

They walked on, the melting asphalt pavement under their feet, the hot, whitey blue sky above. On either side of the wide street in which they were there were shop-fronts, of bright variegated hues; and above the gay shops the windows of countless dwellings, curtained or uncurtained, open or closed, with or without window-boxes full of blooms. The electric

cars, cleanly and hardly coloured as enamelled toys, rolled and crashed along their rails, with the ping! of bells and the quick, clipped directions of the guards. A piano-organ by the kerb rippled with melody, the nodding, smiling head of the Italian girl who turned the handle joining in the suggestion of an exuberance of pleasure. To Drusilla and Cowie the whole scene was just now dear and beautiful, full of the mystery and romance of life. They walked on in silence till they reached the corner of the narrower, sloping street in which the Trathbys lived. Then Cowie said, in a low voice: "Thank you"; and they met Aunt Caroline coming up the street.

Drusilla introduced Cowie to her aunt, and then remembered that *The Lady's Circle* said that you should not introduce people in the street: she wondered if Aunt Caroline, too, remembered this and was gloating over the blunder. But Aunt Caroline, like the women at the Eire Club, seemed sensible of Cowie's charm.

"He's a nice fellow," she said, as Cowie, straight and trim, went off with his casual lift of the hat.

"Yes," Drusilla said, not hearing her.

Cowie got on to one of the bright, clean cars—one with orange and lemon colours—and sat on the top, smoking cigarettes while he was being carried homewards. He smoked from habit and because he had a feeling that he must appear decently composed. His habitual content was glorified into exultation, his cheerfulness into radiance. He had asked: "Miss Trathbye, would you not call it a fine thing for a woman to love a man with her whole heart?" or words to that effect; and she had answered: "Yes." Not meaninglessly, not in mere general acquiescence. How divinely she had said it, with what a resonance of

triumph, in what an abandonment of heart revelation. "Yes!" . . . He re-created the sound of it again and again as the car bore him homewards. Lights were beginning to blossom in the city; and every light had a new meaning for him. The city was no longer merely a home, a dear pleasant place for work and play, for friendships and those singular relationships styled "business connections." It had become a place full of the mystery and romance of life, of latent raptures, terrors, and enmities. The heart of God pulsed in it.

Drusilla was looking out from the open parlour window. She saw a haziness of blue distance, of sheeny, dull blue roofs and dimly coloured stone; heard a heavy hum and clatter, far off from the Trathbyes' quiet side street. Here and there a window glimmered yellow, and the street lamps spangled the twilight. Drusilla could smell the blossom of an elder-bush in a grass-plot three stories below her; and its fragrance blended into her dreamy sense of summer, of sweetness. She lingered, loving the dusty blueness, the huddled houses, the scurr of feet on the pavements. She thought of all the mystery and romance that the city held: she heard in the streets the footsteps of the God of Love: she felt the pulsing of his heart.

But she did not think of Alexander Cowie: because, when she had said: "Yes!" she had been thinking of Michael Quentin.

CHAPTER III

THE BUGLES OF THE CHAMPIONS

THE morning post had brought the Trathbyes two envelopes. One contained a letter from John, Mrs. Trathbye's son, who was still in Ireland. Mrs. Trathbye's husband had been the owner of an attenuated property which had come down to him through a long line of more or less distinguished, and more or less reckless, ancestors. Mr. Trathbye had not been able to cope with the troubles that he had inherited ; and after a long wearisome life of lawsuits, of hunting, shooting, and fishing, and, latterly, of defending himself against his wife's reproaches, he had died when John was twenty. Several of Mrs. Trathbye's children had been short-lived, and when John was entering his young manhood, his sisters were little children. Examination of Mr. Trathbye's affairs showed that they were in a wretched state, only one scrap of property, a portion of the moorland village of Croaghnaill, in County Galway, being legally claimable by his heir.

" Ah ! I wish we could get out of this ! " Mrs. Trathbye repeated. She had said it often before : it expressed the spirit which had animated her during most of her married life of disappointments, failures, joys, and blunders. She had that curious optimism regarding changes in the disposal of material things which sometimes co-exists with a complete pessimism regarding human motives and achievements. She did not believe that any good thing could be found in her husband's people, nor indeed in any people : but the

scenes of her married life had been for so long associated with her chagrins that it seemed to her, impatient, that the inanimate surroundings must have absorbed all the enmity of fate. "Let us get out of this! Let us get away!" she had said over and over again; angrily sometimes, but never in truth with enough of bitterness to urge her to translate her speech into action. She knew in her heart that she had often been happy, that the place was alive with memories that clung to her with warm hands. She had a vague delight in being somebody with an honour that was independent of poverty, debts, and lawsuits: she had a fear, more vague, of the world beyond, though she was incapable of knowing that there she would be rated as a nobody. So she had said: "I wish we could get away: we'll never do any good here!" and had remained in love with her ill-luck, tending her fowls in the yard, playing with her living children in the charming half-wild garden, visiting the graves of her dead children in the churchyard. But when her husband died Mrs. Trathbye found that circumstances, perhaps maliciously, perhaps in mere stupidity, insisted on granting her expressed wish. She was practically obliged to go: she had three little girls who—John said plainly—would eat up all that there was. And Mrs. Trathbye's hesitation was—in John's opinion—made a crime by the receipt of a letter from a distant cousin, a poor relation, a disgraceful, kind faithful creature, who, many years ago, had started a boarding-house in Glasgow. Let Mrs. Trathbye put her own fifty pounds a year into the boarding-house. Let her take the little girls and, when they became older, have them taught "to do something" there. Above all, let her take Aunt Caroline, who would . . .

be useful in the boarding-house . . . in many ways. . . .

Mrs. Trathbye went, taking with her the three children, a servant for the boarding-house, and the superfluous Caroline ; an unfortunate creature, a young woman who had succumbed to the first touch of aunt-hood ; whom no one expected, or wished, to get married, she herself least of all. John's dread was that she might be left on his hands, and he had protested stormily against his mother's idea that Aunt Caroline should remain to keep house for him. Even after she had been taken away he apprehended her return.

Mrs. Trathbye and Caroline went in a vortex of feelings, grief, shame, hope, and an innocent exultation in their own activity, an innocent fanciful curiosity regarding the strange city to which they were going. Drusilla, who was seven at the time, and Essie who was six, remembered well the wonders, the fusses and fatigues at Greenock on the Clyde in the early morning ; the grey-greenness of the sky and the river, the shining of the wet pier, the groanings and gasps of the big steamer, the loud weeping of Aunt Caroline, broken down with weariness and homesickness and unkindly questioned about the tickets which in her anguish on the boat she had mislaid.

"Take our name," Mrs. Trathbye had said haughtily to the unimpressed official. But the tickets had been found, in Aunt Caroline's squashed little black bag, beaten into a sort of pulp with remains of bananas and meat sandwiches. Drusilla could always re-create—with a pang so poignant that it was almost love—the desolate dowdy figure, the cold little hands groping in the bag, the sudden flash of happy relief lighting

up the meagre face ravaged by sea-sickness and sorrow.

The Trathbyes lived for four years with the poor relation ; quarrelling, taking offence, losing money, and every now and then forming plans for vaguely "going away altogether." At the end of the fourth year the poor relation died, and, for two years, Mrs. Trathbye and Aunt Caroline "ran" the boarding-house themselves. "Ran" was the word that they used afterwards when they spoke of this matter : but the truth is that the thing did not run—it hobbled, with a gait that was ever more blundering and feeble. At the end of the second year it was closed, and Mrs. Trathbye, relieved from immediate anxieties but vulgarised and embittered, retired with Aunt Caroline and the children into a three-roomed flat, where they must exist on Mrs. Trathbye's fifty pounds a year and the odd sums that Aunt Caroline earned by contributing to the cookery and household columns of various Irish papers. Aunt Caroline had tried several times to obtain what she called "a situation" ; answering advertisements almost, it seemed, at random, so utterly unfitted was she for the work specified. At intervals, especially when she had a disagreement with Mrs. Trathbye, she still put her name down on the books of registries and trudged to mystical appointments. But she was never engaged nor, indeed, would she have known what to do had such a thing happened. The recommendation from one of her Irish editors—an old family friend to whom she owed all her little acceptances—secured her a regular monthly column on a Wicklow paper. "It will clothe her," Mrs. Trathbye said to the girls ; and Caroline, who was always clothed rather than dressed, compiled "pars" about

etiquette, fashion, and food. She did give a little to household expenses and so, later, did Essie and Kathleen, trained as typists : but Mrs. Trathbye, in her eagerness to dominate, spoke always of her fifty pounds as if it were their whole income. They had moved to a slightly larger flat when Kathleen had begun to earn. Drusilla was "at home." She had been for a year and a half in a situation in an art shop, where she had learned some needlework and marqueterie staining ; and, as she had a talent for design and colouring, her prospects had been good. But her mother had suddenly and inexplicably removed her from the shop. A family silence shrouded this incident.

It was now seventeen years since the Trathbys had left Ireland ; and during these years John had been occupied in losing the poor sums that he had inherited. He was still the owner of the row of huddled cottages in Croaghnaill, County Galway. He had passed frantically from lawsuit to lawsuit in his attempts to show that the land could not belong to the persons who had purchased it. There was a desperate foreboding of the time when "family" should count for nothing, in his yielding to circumstances so far as to search for a post : but he could find none suitable to John Trathbye, whose forefathers had all been gentlemen. Besides, the poor fellow could do nothing except ride sublimely. He had been educated to the idea that the word "family" is symbolic of a sacred fact. It had not occurred to him that it would be wise, even at his age, to learn to do something and to make a living by his own efforts. He preferred to stay in a place in which he was known, respectfully spoken to, and occasionally blessed. The delusion that "John

Trathbye " stood for some eternal truth, a manifestation of the great Mystery of Blood, kept him from realising that he was a jaded man, shabby, with countrified clothes and dirty nails ; lounging at corners with drivers and grooms, drinking in the forlorn inn, playing cards with the red-eyed wheezing old canon who officiated in the little Episcopalian Church. John stayed at Croaghnaill, living meagrely in the two-storied cottage at the end of the row, running up bills at the single local shop, writing to his mother and sisters for " loans."

That John might *not* stay at Croaghnaill was, indeed, just one of the things that Drusilla and her sisters feared. In their childhood they had thought of him as a matter for pride. Copying their mother, they had talked about their property in Ireland and their big brother there. Then, as Drusilla grew older, she had been more and more transpierced by the sense of inconsistencies in her mother's speeches. Mrs. Trathbye had humour, and it played the devil with her sometimes, freakishly, suddenly, in the midst of her solemn humbugging. She must break out into mockery of the family property—the six one-storied cottages and the tall two-storied one, facing the bare climbing road, the dry-stone wall, and the purple moor at Croaghnaill. Drusilla had a distinct enough memory of the poor place : she had often sat on that wall, with the westering sun on her face and its nimbus of hair, and, looking over the moor to the shrill silver streak of the sea, had dreamed and wondered.

For years she had thought of John as a big handsome fellow. Aunt Caroline, even more than Mrs. Trathbye herself, spoke emotionally of his good looks, his talents and charms.

“ John’s a gentleman,” Mrs. Trathbye said, as if it were matter for tears. “ John, poor fellow ! ” was an exclamation to which the girls had become accustomed on the receipt of his mournful letters. They had formed the habit of standing under his photograph admiring it ; partly in the courtierism of children desiring to be in favour with their elders, partly because the barrenness of their lives demanded the forcing of some sort of blossom of idealism. It was in a mood of rebellion, when she had been slapped and thrust from her mother’s presence, that Drusilla had first questioned John’s beauty. Standing under his picture she had found him long-faced and small-eyed and had exulted in the daring heresy. Mrs. Trathbye had a habit of saying that Drusilla was not at all like John, and the girl felt that, to say any one *was* like John, was, in Mrs. Trathbye, a mark of love. . . .

. . . Drusilla’s loss of faith in John had synchronised with the discovery that there was something in her own appearance that made her mother dislike her. Oh, sometimes, only sometimes ! her heart protested. She supposed for some time that it was because she had red hair. She had heard her mother say once, with a bitter rage, that an evil-wisher had foretold that she should have a red-haired child ; and Drusilla began to be jealous of Essie and Kathleen and John because their hair was brown.

But the power of John waned slowly. His visits in those early days had been festivities. The best room in the house was given up to him ; and as the Trathbye girls had grown up and their demands for space increased, the sacrifices made for him became more and more difficult and obvious. Mrs. Trathbye and Aunt Caroline rejoiced in them in a kind of religious rapture.

The girls acquiesced in them, more and more dully, as they emerged from their childhood's ignorance and servility. They saw John as a creature little interested in them and not interesting to them; a creature who smoked and ate and drank and "made trouble," doing nothing in exchange. They began to be wary of "lending a few shillings to poor John." They began to be ashamed of his queer clothes and ill-cut hair and his speech, which every year seemed more of a brogue. They lost belief in his power to "get a good berth": they were sceptical about his letters to people who "might be useful to him." It was a relief to them that he came more seldom, though they tried to hide the guilty feeling when they saw their mother and Aunt Caroline disappointed and weeping. Drusilla especially was glad when John did not come. For, her mother's tyranny having refused to let her become a business girl, she must see John in the most abhorrent intimacy—must remove the littered tray after he had breakfasted in bed, must sort out his soiled linen, empty his hand-basin with bits of paper, dabbed with soap-froth from his razor, floating on the water. . . . Always, Drusilla could make herself feel sick by recalling John's room as it was on the mornings of one of his visits—the odour of tobacco, the pipe, the empty beer-bottle from the night before, the tumbled bed, the comic papers with ugly little pictures. She had grown more and more resentful at the sight of John eating—in his inelegant manner—the only piece of meat or fish on the table, while his female relatives ate potatoes or egg sandwiches. Essie and Kathleen shared this indignation; but they were more cautious than Drusilla, less sensuously refined, and less constantly witnesses of the excesses of sex-worship

practised by their mother and Aunt Caroline. It was therefore at her eldest daughter that Mrs. Trathbye looked in defiance as she said :

“ Poor John. . . . He’ll not be able to come to us this summer.”

Kathleen and Essie looked relieved : their holidays began in a few days, and they had been saving money out of their salaries. They avoided each other’s eyes, but their mouths relaxed into pleasantness.

“ Poor John, things aren’t going very brightly with him,” Mrs. Trathbye said, wiping her eyes. The girls became slightly depressed ; and Aunt Caroline, with an air of considering other people’s feelings, put her own letter under her plate.

“ Has he heard anything about that situation ? ” Drusilla ventured, for the sake of seeming interested in John.

“ Ah—agh ! ” Mrs. Trathbye uttered fiercely. “ He’s as anxious to get a situation, poor fellow, as you are for him to get one. A person would think, to hear you talk, that he was going through all this for amusement.”

“ People that do nothing always talk in that way,” Aunt Caroline said.

Tears came into Drusilla’s eyes ; for her obstinate sensitiveness survived the roughest treatment. Essie, with a suggestion of sympathy in her face—they had a common cause against John—offered her sister a piece of toast.

“ I made that for *you*,” Aunt Caroline said.

“ Well, I haven’t time to eat it,” Essie said as she rose, glancing at the clock.

Aunt Caroline made her absurd little shoulder-lifting movement, and muttered as her habit was. A few words came articulately . . . “ something else to

do than be making toast for people that have nothing to do" . . . "getting up in the morning to make toast for people" . . . "going down on my knees at the fire, and burning all my face, this broiling weather, to make toast. . . ."

"John says he went into Dublin last Friday about that position," Mrs. Trathbye said in quite a lively tone. She read on and began to laugh. "He says Moir's Hotel was dreadfully full and he had to sleep on a horsehair sofa in another man's room. He says the man was a publican."

"Mercy!" Kathleen said.

Aunt Caroline took her letter from under her plate, and fingered it, flushing and looking wistfully. No one asking a question, she turned to Mrs. Trathbye.

"This is an invitation to Lady Cairne's garden-party," Aunt Caroline said with a self-conscious shake of her head.

"Mercy!" Kathleen exclaimed, ironical.

Aunt Caroline began to laugh: she was fluttered and exalted.

"It's as representative of *The Lady's Circle*," she said, when they had all examined the card and Mrs. Trathbye had read it aloud.

"'In aid of the Friends of the Helpless,'" Mrs. Trathbye repeated. "What is that, Caroline?"

"It's some kind of society for encouraging kindness to animals," Aunt Caroline said.

"Mr. Quentin belongs to it," Drusilla said.

"Some kind of mad thing, I suppose," Mrs. Trathbye said with a teasing laugh. "Goodbye! Goodbye, darling!" she shouted in response to Essie and Kathleen. The door slammed behind them, the letter-box clanking.

"What in the living earth are you going to wear, Caroline?" Mrs. Trathbye exclaimed rather than asked with a solemn devoutness. Drusilla was listening, interested: she sat at the table, facing the two other women. The radiance of sleep and dreams still lingered about her: her cheeks and eyes were bright: the splendid hair, loosely tied with a blue ribbon, was fluffy and sunlit.

"I can't go," Aunt Caroline said. "How can I go? I haven't a stitch to put on me."

"Of course we all knew you'd say that," Mrs. Trathbye jeered. "You've as much as any of us here."

"I wasn't saying anything about that," Aunt Caroline said. "We've all little enough, I'm sure." Her voice shook and she wiped her eyes. Mrs. Trathbye began to laugh and Drusilla could not help joining her.

"Your grey dress ought to do, Aunt Carlie," Drusilla said, compunctious, as Aunt Caroline completely broke down. "If you'd a new hat. . . ."

"Agh, I've no money to be getting new hats," Aunt Caroline said. The exact amount of her earnings was hidden from her family, and she always declared that she had "no money." "My grey dress isn't fit to be seen."

"Could you wear my biscuit-coloured costume?" Drusilla asked. "I'll lend it to you."

For a moment, Aunt Caroline's peaked little face lighted up: then she said: "Agh, I could live in it!" Aunt Caroline, for some occult reason, was proud of her leanness.

"You might make it do, Caroline," Mrs. Trathbye suggested. "It's good-natured of her to offer you

the loan of it. Not that she's very careful of her clothes," she added, qualifying the commendation. "You'd think she'd had that costume ten years instead of one."

"I've had it nearly three years!" Drusilla blazed out. "Aunt Carlie needn't take it if she doesn't want it. It's far too long, of course."

"I'll try it on," Aunt Caroline said, rather alarmed at the idea of the offer being withdrawn.

The biscuit-coloured costume—a ready-made, bestowed on Drusilla with many warnings and moralisings—looked absurd on Aunt Caroline's little figure, narrow-chested, long-necked, round-shouldered. She was singularly uncritical of her own appearance and would have worn the thing: but Drusilla was almost frenzied in her efforts to prevent it; and Mrs. Trathbye, after animatedly contradicting her daughter, gave it as her own opinion that Caroline would be a fright in the coat and skirt.

Aunt Caroline resigned herself to wearing her own thin black costume, buying a lace jabot for the neck. She had a dreadful sun-damaged old toque that she wore with the blacks on Sundays. Drusilla—who had a very pretty knack in trimming a hat—offered to remake the toque. But her mother flouted the suggestion. "She'd never finish it," Mrs. Trathbye said to Aunt Caroline. "She'd just take it to pieces and leave it for some one else to put together again. . . ." Yet in the evening they gave the toque to Kathleen, who took it to pieces and dusted it, then went here and there seeking suitable needles and thread and "a bit of something" for the renovation of the toque. Finally, after heating attempts, she lost her temper and left the thing in a heap on the parlour table;

and Mrs. Trathbye and Essie found Aunt Caroline late at night, blind with crying, and the three of them botched the straw and silk and the bunch of blue plums into something that was worse than what the toque had been, but different. . . .

II

It was of these and other trivial things that Drusilla was thinking on a day in August, the day of the garden-party. She sat in the kitchen, which was on the eastern side of the tall tenement building, and, at this hour in the afternoon, lighted evenly with a clear greyness. Sounds from the flats alongside and below and from the stairs came through the frail walls. The window gave a view of a back-green with red-brick outhouses roofed with concrete ; and beyond that the back-gardens, leafy and flowery, of villas in a higher street. Mrs. Trathbye, with a sick headache, was in bed, and Drusilla was watching the brown enamelled kettle on the gas-ring. She was fond of cosy chairs, but avoided the old rocking-chair just as she avoided the touch of Aunt Caroline herself. Drusilla sat on a wooden stool, her hands clasped round her knee, and her higher foot, in a blue stocking and neat cheap black velvet slipper, slowly swinging to and fro. Her eye for effect, her joy in her own person, co-operated with her beauty ; it was wonderfully easy for her to look "dressed." Her two-year-old print dress, blue finely speckled with white, and the vivid hues of her head and face had a luminous effect in the quiet clean kitchen, barely furnished and greyly lighted.

Essie and Kathleen were enjoying their holidays,

boarding at a farm-house in Arran, paying for the change with money saved during the working months of going to and fro, in heat and chill, in rain and fog ; of catching cold on the platforms of overcrowded electric cars, of eating insufficient lunches in tea-rooms. Drusilla herself had had a little "change," a visit of a fortnight to friends at Portobello : it had cost nothing but the price of her ticket, it had been a little slow, but . . . "You ought to be glad of the chance," Aunt Carlie had said. "Other people have to pay for their holidays and get a lot of clothes ready." Drusilla's grave red mouth widened in a laugh, as she thought of the preparations made by Kathleen and Essie, the merry shifts, the jests and hopefulness of pleasure, the joy in the money safe from John's rapacity. In holiday-time Essie and Kathleen seemed just two dear jolly girls, piteous in their endeavours. If they were on holiday for a much larger proportion of their time ? If somebody—somehow—could seize on their lives and carry them away from out of the vortex of drudgeries ? . . . Aunt Caroline, too, appeared as a creature clamant for rescue : Drusilla's lips again suddenly lost their beautiful curve of mournfulness. It was laughable, the memory of Aunt Caroline as she had been this afternoon in the madness of her preparation, in the dumb excitement of her exit. The emptiness of the old rocking-chair, the sight of Aunt Caroline's account-book and fountain-pen on the topmost of the three little bookshelves on the kitchen wall, made Drusilla realise how seldom Aunt Caroline went anywhere. There was pathos in the account-book, from which a certain number of leaves were neatly torn for the rough copies of the column in *The Lady's Circle*. It was amazing

that any paper should print such rubbish, botched together and regularly despatched with a painstaking faithfulness. . . . Drusilla visualised Aunt Caroline at the garden-party, taking notes, absurdly cowed and servile, clad in her frowzy black and that travesty of a toque, with long protruding hat-pins. Mrs. Trathbye regarded her sister-in-law's work with a mingling of shame and complacency : it was " lady's " work and insured them against the disgrace of Caroline's seeking of menial situations : but even Mrs. Trathbye, with her ignorance of life and her sensitiveness to the hypnotism of words, felt that the phrases " journalistic capacity," " literary work," and " correspondent of *The Lady's Circle*," did not succeed in creating the illusion that Caroline was a dignified social unit.

Yet she had a kind of dignity. Drusilla realised this, vaguely and suddenly, as her gaze, swooping towards the now singing kettle, paused again on the lank account-book and the fountain-pen. There was a little space allotted to these articles in a house in which space was a thing for which people fought. She thought of scores of instances in which her mother, her sisters, and her aunt had seemed to form a combine to oppose the housing of her little properties—her books, her work-basket, her drawing-board, her hat-box. Tears came childishly, as she told herself that it was unfair to blame her for not " taking an interest " in her clothes when she was not allowed even a peg in a wardrobe or cupboard, but must keep her garments which she loved in a dreadful crumpling old basket. Essie and Kathleen were granted space for their dresses and coats, their boots and work, their fancies and experiments in hat-dyeing or potting plants. But Drusilla was afraid even to wash her

handkerchiefs unless Aunt Caroline and her mother were out.

"It's because they earn money," Drusilla thought. "Aunt Caroline earns money. . . . Only a little . . . but it goes on coming." Then, illuminative, came the thought : "People never respect you unless you're earning money. It's the basis . . . in all sorts of human intercourse." Drusilla exulted in this expression : she was, then, becoming consciously articulate as the result of her studies and the discussions at the Eire Club, the conversations during the walks home. "Right economic relations . . ." The phrase came to her, jostling others, such as "cubic space," "right of a human being to a place in society." She had struggled through an oppressive pamphlet by a German Socialist—a book which Miss Morland had recommended to her and lent, with uncut leaves. Drusilla remembered that this German Socialist had said that there were only two great kindred problems—Wage-earning and the Sex Problem.

Wage-earning—money—the power to make one's own living, to be able to buy lovely clothes and pay for a place in which to keep them daintily. One could have nothing without paying for it. . . . But Wage-earning was not all. According to the German Socialist, there was also the Sex Problem.

Drusilla, seated on the stool, was thinking intensely. It was strange, for example, that just now she should have seen Aunt Caroline, Essie, and Kathleen as pitiable creatures whose cases cried for rescue ; while, almost in the same moment, their economic soundness should have appeared to her, the validity of their claim to house-room and to the respect of their fellows. If Wage-earning were the only problem, then Aunt

Caroline, Essie, and Kathleen were enviable to her. But the presence of the Sex Problem might do something to remove the apparent inconsistency? The German Socialist had said that the Sex Problem was inseparable from the Wage-earning Problem. . . . Drusilla tried to focus the light rays streaming from this enormous fact so that they might make clear her own little life.

She was beginning to understand, she thought. Economically, her position was inferior to Essie's, to Kathleen's, even to Aunt Caroline's: but sexually she was their superior. . . . How had that old German made out that there was a necessary connection between sex and money? She remembered some of the things he had said, so new to her that her wonder and interest had absorbed her: she had had no room for horror. . . . He had spoken of women's beauty as a thing that could be bought and sold; he had called women's bodies "Capital."

Drusilla rose startled by a sound somewhere. It may have been only the squealing of a pulley in the flat below; but it sounded so like a moan that she went to her mother's room.

"Mother, are you all right? Did you call?"

"Ah, how can you ask if I'm all right?" Mrs. Trathbye muttered. She was lying in a mass of crushed pillows and twisted bedclothes. The windows had been shut to keep out the relentless noises of the streets—the shouts of a vendor of "Veec-tor-ee-a plums!" the jingle of a madly driven milk-cart, the screeching laughter of a group of message boys and girls.

"Can't I go out and get you something?" Drusilla asked, coming near to the bed, longing for the right to

tend and fondle her mother. . . . "It's awfully light," she went on, looking at the pale green canvas blind suffused in sunshine—"I might put something up."

She brought a screen from the parlour and placed it, dark and tottering, across the window. Doing this, she caught sight of her figure in the glass of the wardrobe door—the only long glass in the Trathbyes' flat. She paused, assuming poses, enjoying the beauties of her shape, the colours seen subduedly in the dim light, the strong blue of the cotton frock, the golds and reds of the hair. She heard a movement in the bed.

"That's all right : go away," Mrs. Trathbye said in the tone of one tortured. "Thanks," she added gently.

Drusilla went to the bedside and kissed her. Mrs. Trathbye's face was hot and discoloured : her hair was scattered about it, scanty, a mingling of fair brown and grey. She often told her daughters that, in her youth, her tresses, of a bright golden, fell to her knees ; and the girls pretended, to her, to each other, and each to herself, that the thing was believed.

Mrs. Trathbye's hot lips clung to Drusilla's.

"You're a good girl—a good child," she faltered hysterically.

Drusilla was easily moved to tears : she went back to the kitchen crying, full of ruth. Lately—almost suddenly—it had become possible for her to understand something of the struggle that was going on in Mrs. Trathbye's heart ; and her mother's life took on the colour of tragedy. Long hair—even apocryphally golden—long golden hair and all those other beauties of which she and her sisters had been told again and again at bedtime ; and her mother's career as the

result ! Mrs. Trathbye said that she had been married at nineteen, though the statement hardly tallied with her accounts of many pre-marital love-affairs and a broken engagement : but she had certainly been married while she was, by modern standards, a young girl. She had married a man with property, a man beyond her expectations as a dowerless orphan of good family. She spoke reservedly, with a modest cynicism, of men and marriage ; and Drusilla had heard her mention cases of passionate love seldom and always with an angry abhorrence. This fear of facing the question of love was the only sign that Mrs. Trathbye had ever given that Love was a thing which, as a reality, could touch her. The long broken uncoloured years of her life had passed unlighted, unshaken by Love. She had never done, nor inspired, anything beautiful or wicked and strange. It seemed fitting that Aunt Caroline, Essie, and Kathleen, should ask of life only varying amounts of littleness : but Drusilla felt that it *ought* to have been different with her mother, once so sweet and handsome, still so vivid and proud. It was peculiarly piteous that these sordid, disproportionate beggings of hers should be futile. A woman to whose milky throat and long shining hair a score of young men in Ireland had written poems—and this alien modern city jauntily offered her a flat in a slim-walled tenement, and an insufficiency of food, fire, and clothing.

Drusilla thought sorrowfully that the only way of ministering to her mother now lay in the satisfying of these bodily needs. The time for beauty and wickedness and wonder was gone : the only improvement that could be made in her mother's mental atmosphere without making it too rarefied for her present self,

was the introduction of the sense of social safety and the modest importance that comes of the power to run up accounts and engage domestic servants. Mrs. Trathbye was no longer ambitious save to have "enough to come and go on": she had lost much of her personal daintiness. She would (Drusilla thought) be contented with a little more room, a little more food and fuel and clothing; and she ought to have a good doctor and an occasional change to the seaside or the country: she ought to be able to go for a drive sometimes and to the play of which she had once been excitably fond. . . . Was that all? It sounded so "practical."

The girls too, and . . . Aunt Caroline. So little was needed to make them much happier and, consequently, much more agreeable social units. Essie and Kathleen too liked the theatre: they liked dancing, and tennis, and reading novels, and lying in cosy chairs by the fire: they were easily satisfied in such matters as dress and social intercourse. Drusilla, adding up the family earnings, concluded that, if she could gain a salary twice as big as Essie's or Kathleen's, it would lift them over the line between the thing called economy and the thing called comfort. They could keep a servant!

But she could not get a salary. Her mind paused on the thought, with a sense of something left out. Just now, in her loving, sentimental mood, she did not want to realise how and why she had been left incapable of earning what the Socialist called a "living wage." There were things in her life that she must leave wilfully uncomprehended if she was going to feel tender and happy and protective to her family. And she *needed* to feel so: her heart was too

quarter's rent, and the necessity of emptying ash-pans. She had since her childhood breathed in an atmosphere of unconscious cynicism regarding everything poetically fine ; and, since her heart must have fine things to feed on, she had learned to go, when she was hungry, to a place of dreams where she was fed. Her dreams, but Michael Quentin's realities ! At any rate, " which-ever was which," a quite distinct line in Drusilla's consciousness parted them. Her own dream of Love and the view she accepted of marriage were, in her thoughts, no more co-operative than were the ideal of conduct of her mother's cherished Prayer Book and the morality of life in the Trathbyes' flat. A long course of snubbing, of under-feeding, physical and intellectual, of the witnessing of failures, blunderings, and futilities, had inoculated Drusilla with something of the family hopelessness. Her mysteriously strong vitality fought against it, as did her deeply hidden sense that she had really come into the world for the sake of an unknown divine thing to be found : but the poison worked in her blood, forbidding her to expect anything beautiful, wicked, and wonderful—anything that was not petty and meagre. Marriage, considered in what Mrs. Trathbye would have called a " sane " way, or perhaps a " nice " way—marriage was a change for the better in one's material circumstances. It meant that one was supplied with a house of one's own and with housekeeping money ; and that one had dresses and presents and was kissed and made much of and handed over to a nice good man who would thereafter take care of one. . . . Of course Mrs. Trathbye would stipulate that the man must be nice and good : she fiercely condemned men and women who were wicked—who ran away with wives

or husbands, who stabbed sweethearts, or flung themselves into the river. . . .

Well! . . . Alexander Cowie was, apparently, a nice good man. An arch smile broke up the seriousness of Drusilla's face, changing its sweet bemusedness into mirth. It had become clear to her that Cowie admired her. Since their dispute he had written her a letter, ostensibly apologetic, but full of personal opinions and details. He had written again, thanking her for replying, sending a book: he had called to leave another book one day when she had been out in the park with a girl friend, a neighbour's daughter. He was shyly anxious to walk home with her from the meetings of the Eire Club.

Suppose she were to marry—not exactly Alick Cowie, of course, but some one very like him? Her fancy carelessly hailed the idea, appearing and re-appearing in the mists of her half-formed thoughts: she allowed it to develop, for the first time, into a thing that it was permissible to imagine. She shrank from certain details and, inconsistently, was boldly realistic regarding others. Thus she pleased herself with rehearsing the words of her fictional reply to Cowie's—or the man like Cowie's—fictional declaration of his wish; but she flinched, flushing, from precise wording of his declaration itself. She fancied his gifts to her—bunches of pink and purple sweet-peas which she would fasten in the belt of this blue, white-speckled frock; boxes containing soft kid gloves and embroidered handkerchiefs; boxes of chocolate creams, in seductive rows, under fuzzy mats of paper. She made mental pictures of jaunts with him—sails and coach drives in which one or more of her relatives might share, visits

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to the theatre, dances. She would always, or nearly always, insist on one of the others going too : that was " nice." She would tell Cowie—the young man like Cowie—to dance with Essie and Kathleen and to introduce his friends to them ; and she happily visualised herself and her sisters, warm-cheeked and twinkling-footed, in their white frocks. . . . It was not at all difficult to fit a figure like Cowie's into such scenes. Cowie " composed " quite well with the life with which she was familiar and the people whom she knew. Cowie had already said : " Your aunt seems a good-natured old body " ; had asked Drusilla if her sisters went to " business," and was simple and casual in his allusions to milkmen and high teas. To confront him with bare soapy arms would not astound him. Drusilla's family would have a sense of condescending to the Cowies. There would be no straining, no necessity for repulsive little concealments ; and his standards of morality and refinement—not, it seemed, exhaustingly high—would allow of little inferiorities to which she had become accustomed. Cowie himself would (she thought) see no harm in her getting presents out of him—he would smile at the pretty femininity and childishness of it. . . . It would be all sensible and nice and sisterly and daughterly and—Drusilla's smile came again at the suggested word—" niecely." It would set her free and give the others more room and more food, she supposed ; and it would make them very kind to her : people in the novels and ladies' journals were always tender and smiley to a girl about to be married. And the demands of the man like Cowie would be easy to fulfil. A nice decent young man with those mysterious solid qualities which were said to last long after passion had fluttered

itself to death. . . . There was no room for Love in a tenement ! It meant the soiling and breaking of his wing-feathers.

Drusilla rose quickly, not noticing that the kettle had begun to boil. Crossing the kitchen and hall she thought that she heard again, twice repeated, the sound of a moan. She listened, standing exquisitely poised and glowing-haired, in the wedge of light from the half-open kitchen door ; and the sound resolved itself into a subdued uncomfortable cough. It was so close to her that Drusilla started : she realised that it came from outside the hall-door and thought of hooking the chain or turning the key. " Strange man " was, in the Trathbye household, a phrase creative of horrors : Mrs. Trathbye and Aunt Caroline spoke with a bitter pathos of their unprotected state. " If a man were to force himself in at that hall-door he might do what he liked to any one of us ! " Mrs. Trathbye said, complaining of the police rates. Aunt Caroline, more physically courageous, had been known to rise up at a noise heard in the night and search, carrying a heavy stick and " trembling from head to foot and with my heart *stopped* for fully a minute ! "

Recollections of these absurdities made Drusilla laugh at her own idea of securing the door. The cough came again, followed by a timid drag at the bell : the handle groaned in its socket but the bell did not ring. Another cough came, stifled.

" It's Mr. Patullo," Drusilla thought, suddenly recognising the sound. " What a time he must have been poking about on the landing ! "

She opened the door, and saw old Patullo in his fawn coat and with his wretched crush hat in his hand.

III

"Good afternoon, Miss Trathbye: it's a lovely afternoon," Patullo said in his propitiatory, cultured voice.

"Yes," Drusilla said.

"You're all quite well? Your aunt is hard at work? I should like a little talk with you if you can spare me a few minutes."

"Will you come in?" Drusilla said, wondering. As they entered the sitting-room the door of Mrs. Trathbye's bedroom creaked.

"Your aunt isn't in?" Patullo said, when he was seated in the decadent leathern arm-chair. "It is partly on *her* account I called. I hope you will pardon the liberty in a next-door neighbour. The fact is, I think I can put some more journalistic work in your aunt's way."

"How kind of you!" Drusilla exclaimed warmly. She had been thinking that Patullo always spoke in correctly constructed sentences and wondering if this were due to his profession; and she had been noting the delicacy of his hands and the two long festoons of moustache that hung down at the sides of his unhappy mouth. He sat with his back to the light and she was glad that this somewhat blurred his face. The dirtiness of his clothing offended her, so that there was a touch of compunction in her acknowledgment of his kindness.

"Not in the least, Miss Trathbye," he said. "Indeed, I have often thought of asking your permission to call, since you told me, at the Eire, that your aunt was a journalist. I have a good many friends on various papers, you know."

"Yes," Drusilla said, having heard him say so often at the club. "What papers?" she asked, suddenly inspired.

There was a pause.

"Several London papers," Patullo said. "And I have local influence as well. I have influence with a very good firm of publishers in London. I might get your aunt some translating work to do. Does she know French and German or Italian?"

"No," Drusilla said, her voice shaking to a laugh. Aunt Caroline had been educated thirty-five years ago at a little private school in an Irish village: she could "conjugate" four French verbs from beginning to end, but could not connect them with any other parts of speech.

"No? That's a pity. But how about you yourself?"

Drusilla shook her head.

"I was taken away from school when I was fourteen," she said pathetically. "I know only the rudiments. I had such a nice teacher."

Patullo looked shocked.

"But have you never thought of doing something in journalism yourself?" he asked, apparently conceding that that was a thing which demanded no schooling.

"Yes," Drusilla answered, sparkling with excitement, "I *should* like it. Funny, just before you came I was wishing I could get some work. . . . I spoke to my mother and my aunt about it once before but . . ."

"You didn't see an opening?" Patullo said, avoiding her eyes.

"They didn't want it," Drusilla said, with her puzzled, woe-begone air. She was looking at Patullo

expectantly, seeing in his visit a suggestion of the truth that wishes and prayers were realities, potent to strive with depressing material things. Patullo's lids were lowered and he moved in his seat in an ashamed, agitated way.

"I might get you some work," he muttered. "Your aunt might help you at first, or she and you might collaborate for a while. . . ."

Drusilla checked a giggle. "I shall speak to Quentin about it," Patullo said suddenly, with a kind of effrontery.

Drusilla stared at him.

"Quentin's uncle is one of the proprietors of *The Teller of Tales*," Patullo said. It was a London monthly of high standing and Drusilla's dazzlement for the moment obliterated her sense of the futility and impudence of an offer to speak to Michael Quentin on her behalf. Why, she herself knew Michael Quentin as well as Patullo did ! There was a sense of escape in the thought that Patullo had spoken in Aunt Caroline's absence : for Drusilla shrank quivering from the idea of Michael being brought into touch with her home life.

"But—do you know Mr. Quentin very well ?" she asked quickly. It was not possible for her to speak entirely without gentleness, indeed only her anger and alarm enabled her to put the question at all : but Patullo flushed and his white pathetic hands clasped and unclasped.

"My name has been known to Mr. Quentin for a long time," he said. "I have had . . . to do . . . with Mr. Moore's paper also. However, I mentioned Mr. Quentin as only one of many possibilities. . . . I have considerable influence in . . . other quarters.

The question is, Miss Trathbye, if you yourself think you should like work, or if your aunt thinks of extending her connection ? ”

“ I should like it very much—I wish it very much,” Drusilla said fervently. There was a hint of huffiness in Patullo’s tone and she blamed herself for her folly in letting this possibly Heaven-sent chance escape her. “. . . But I’m afraid I’m not qualified. . . .”

“ I know your capabilities,” Patullo said with that surprising old-fashioned courtly air of his. “ I have heard you speak at the Eire.”

It was supremely absurd, for Drusilla had risen twice, once to ask a question, once to supply a quotation ; both times timidly, with shaking knees, with the consciousness of being coldly eyed by the other women and only half heard by the occupants of the back benches. She did not infer, however, that Patullo’s insincerity in politeness cast any doubts on his good faith in kindness. And how kind it was of him to come !—a poor, harassed old man lonely and obscure.

“ You write yourself ? ” Drusilla said, venturing the question suggested by these thoughts. Why did Patullo not use this “ influence ” for his own advancement ?

Patullo understood : he flushed again and his veiny white hands made disturbing movements.

“ I write only occasionally : I am otherwise occupied. If I had gone in for literature altogether I have no doubt I should have made quite a decent living at it. But circumstances willed otherwise. . . . What is wanted nowadays is young blood.”

Drusilla thought of Aunt Caroline.

“ But I can’t write—I’ve never written anything

except essays and things," she said. "And sometimes I write letters to newspapers—about stray cats and overworked domestic servants and other things I happen to know a little about. I never show them to any one. You see, I've had no education—not what people call education. The girl in our dairy was kept at school five years longer than I was, and she's having all sorts of evening classes and singing lessons." She broke off, becoming reserved and defensive. "You see, my mother lost most of her property in Ireland when we were very young—and she didn't like to send us to free schools or to mix with . . . funny sorts of children."

"I see. It's quite obvious to any one who has noticed you and your sisters," Patullo said with a stiff bend of his head. . . . "If you have any doubts—on any points of grammar, for example—please bring your manuscripts to me. I shall be delighted. In the meantime, I shall write you an introduction to my friend, Mr. Smales, of *The Glasgow Newsboy*—and you might submit some taking pars or a bright little article of about five hundred."

Drusilla had again a sense of having caught a blue bird only to find that it was a dead one. *The Glasgow Newsboy* was a futile little paper made up of extracts and a lamentable unpaid "Poetry" column.

"You'd rather I did not speak to Mr. Quentin or Mr. Moore?" Patullo said.

"Oh, please don't!" There was a note of keen annoyance in Drusilla's tone. "It is so kind of you, but I'd rather you didn't. I shouldn't like to *use* them—and Aunt Caroline's writing would look so ridiculous in *The Teller of Tales*. . . ."

She checked herself ashamed; relieved to know

that Patullo had become absent-minded. He rose and moved shiftingly doorwards ; stopped and peered at a folio of reproductions of pictures.

"It's mine," Drusilla said shyly : a feeling of criminality was associated with the folio, which she had bought with a shilling given her to buy her lunch one day that her mother had sent her into town to pay the gas-bill at the City Chambers. Patullo knew all the pictures and something of the artists : he pointed out the beauties of colouring and composition, even of nude shapes. It was so pleasant to talk with him that, for the time, Drusilla condoned the dark biliousness of his face, the dandruff on his coat-collar, his impure linen, and the odour—was it of laudanum ?—that came from him. She remembered having read a novel about a woman who formed the opium habit and became dirty in her person. She began to think of Patullo pityingly as a man who had had disappointments and wounds and was trying to drug his heart into dullness. His action in coming had lifted him out of the class of mere neighbours, nonentities who appeared on the stairs and in the passage and disappeared into the unknown of their respective flats ; whose lives came into contact with one another's only at the materialistic points of the loss of a latch-key, a puzzlement about a plumber, a quarrel about a cat.

"Well, we've had a very pleasant chat," Patullo said. "Maybe you'll let me come in again—we're near neighbours and our interests are the same." He paused, fumbling in his pockets as Drusilla's hand touched the sitting-room door. "I'll let you have that introduction as soon as I've leisure to write it, Miss Trathbye. I'll make a note of it as I'm such an

absent-minded beggar——” He drew out a pencil. “I may well say that,” he went on, laughing and shakily drawing out a bank-book. “Here I am without a penny in my pocket, Miss Trathbye! I found myself short of cash this morning and took this out with me with the intention of calling at the bank. Well, it’s been lying *perdu* in my pocket ever since!” The later layers of Patullo’s life had imposed the words and jests of journals and literary societies on his academic vocabulary: he jarred suddenly on Drusilla as Aunt Caroline did with her ladies’ column phrases, “*dernier cri*,” “*gorge de pigeon*,” “a modish thing.” . . . Drusilla stood flushing, vaguely uncomfortable with a sense of what was coming.

“You couldn’t oblige me with the loan of half-a-crown till to-morrow?” Patullo rushed out, quaveringly smiling.

“Certainly,” Drusilla murmured, the Trathbye instinct urging her to hide the fact that she had not a half-crown—that she did not know how to get one. “Excuse me,” she said, and left the room. Opening the door, she had a sense of her mother, dishevelled, fleeing into the bedroom: the door creaked and closed. Drusilla went to the kitchen, where, on one of the shelves for crockery, there was a tin box containing the housekeeping money. She found a florin and brought it to Patullo.

“I’ll look in to give this back to you,” he said, giving it a little toss into the air and catching it, as he left the house. “And I’ll let you have that letter for Smales: just try him with some bright chatty little things. . . .” He tossed the coin again and let it fall, ringing; and he laughed deliriously as he stooped for it, clutching it with a shaking hand.

With a sense of covering something shameful, Drusilla suddenly dismissed him and shut the door. Yet she was inquisitive enough to stand for a minute, listening to his footsteps : he was going downstairs.

She looked round. The bedroom door was ajar and in the aperture her mother showed ; flushed with tossings of hair about her face, her forehead heavily lined with pain. There was a dreadful look in her eyes : Drusilla had seen it before.

She tried to speak. If she could manage to tell her mother about the two shillings—about Patullo's offer—about anything that sounded sane and normal. The terror awakened by that look, with its associations, struck her into speechlessness. If her mother was going to speak again as she had done that time about the art shop, Drusilla felt that she must die. She felt actually faint just now, a darkness coming before her eyes.

"What's the matter with you ?" Mrs. Trathbye's voice came, sounding far away certainly, but human, with a peevish note in it, with even a touch of motherly alarm.

Drusilla leaped to her, clasping her. "Mother ! . . . Oh, Mother."

"What a little savage you are !" Mrs. Trathbye said self-consciously. She went on hurriedly, trying to speak casually, trying to ignore her knowledge of her daughter's horror of the fierce thing that had looked from her eyes : "You shouldn't receive men in that way when there's nobody but yourself. It's not good taste : it isn't nice. . . . I heard something of what Mr. Patullo said," Mrs. Trathbye went on with a miserable cunning, "A person can hear every word in this house—the noises go through and

through me. Why are you against Mr. Quentin helping your aunt ? ”

Drusilla began to cry ; and presently the crying got beyond her control. She had felt able to fight, cruelly if need were, in this matter of Michael Quentin. There was something in her relation with him that gave her courage to scorn trivial tyrannies. But now her strength had gone from her : she felt that she could not recapture her hopeful mood of benevolence. Patullo's coming had been like a promise of help by a means other than marriage : but Patullo and—the man like Cowie—both seemed now to be merely making a noise like a great blustering of bugles outside of an infrangible barrier. . . . Drusilla felt in a vague blurred way the uselessness of her attempts to solve the Wage-earning Problem. Its solution would not bring happiness. The Sex Problem, a terrible, dark lurking thing had looked suddenly from her mother's eyes.

“ Ah, have done—I'm too ill to bear your temper,” Mrs. Trathbye said.

Drusilla heard her mother's slippered feet go softly back into the bedroom. The girl went to the kitchen where the neglected kettle was steaming : she turned off the gas with a kind of rage against it and every hateful uncomprehending thing. She sat on her stool and wept in an abandonment of sorrow, listening to her sobs and wails. She did not care whether the neighbours heard or not through the thin walls.

Then she rose and looked in the glass : it showed her the beauties of rose and white, of red-brown richly lashed eyes and sweet features, all confused, debased, stained. And she bathed her face, tenderly soothing the poor wronged loveliness.

CHAPTER IV

THE HEDGE OF THORNS

I

MICHAEL, lying on the hot sand of the beach near The Corner House, was opening a letter. Racie Moore sprawled near him, smoking and holding a volume of Turgenev. Racie's reading was always a mere skidding and now he had paused between two exquisite pages to roll over on his right side and slant a swift glance at Michael. A line of sand-hummocks sparsely covered with grey-green bent-grass rose between them and the quiet road. Between them and the sea there were long reaches of sand, iridescent, almost fluid, left wet by the tide, which had receded to its uttermost. Birds walked there, crying now and then with a sweet forlornness. The sky and the Irish Sea were mysteries, opaquely misted, blue-grey and still. It was an afternoon early in September. Racie observed that Michael blushed and a silly expression went stealing over his face.

"That's from Mrs. Trathbye," Michael said. There was a childlike admission of confusion in his eyes which stared pleadingly at Racie, in his hanging head and the fluctuations of his colour. . . . "Miss Trathbye's mother," he said.

"Oh, is she?" Racie exclaimed.

Michael laughed delightedly. "You never let these obvious opportunities pass," he said.

"We've got to save ourselves up, you know," Racie said, with the touch of bitterness with which he

always spoke of his profession. Michael was sensible of it : it made him ashamed : he wanted to do something for his friend—to introduce him to the editor of *The Teller of Tales*—to engage him as a travelling-companion. He always found his eagerness battered and brought to limpness against the dead wall of Racie's cynicism, his haughtiness, his indignant faith in his own failure. How could you introduce a writer who wouldn't write—who said he couldn't write . . . ? ”

“ Beg pardon, Mick—what about her ? ” Racie asked.

“ She very kindly asks me to call,” Michael said.

Racie sat up and whistled. The volume of “ Fathers and Children ” dropped, sank a little way into the soft disordered sand.

Michael coloured more hotly in anger at the deliberate air of consternation.

“ What do you mean ? ” he exclaimed.

“ Trying to catch that little fellow's note,” Racie said, signifying a sand-piper and giving Michael a glance from the corner of his eye.

“ H'm ! ” Michael said smiling. “ Never mind. . . . Mrs. Trathbye writes about a business matter. I asked her if I might call and hers is in reply. Patullo spoke to me about Miss Trathbye's aunt, who is a writer and wants to get introductions. Patullo thought I might do something for her.”

“ On *The Teller of Tales* ? ” Racie exclaimed in a surprise no longer feigned.

“ Yes,” Michael said resentfully.

“ Well, I'm—well, of all the——” Racie rolled over, laughing ; then sat up, his coat and hair spattered with sand. “ Miss Caroline Trathbye is the lady you mean ? ”

"Yes. Now you're going to tell me you know all about her though a few weeks ago you hadn't heard her name," Michael jeered. "You never make mistakes on *The Mercury*."

"*The Mercury* is one huge mistake," Racie said. "Listen, Mick," he went on, grave. "As a matter of fact, I do know something about Caroline Trathbye. I admit I was ignorant of her name till quite recently. What of that? One knows things to-day that one didn't know yesterday."

"Oh, don't argue——!" Michael uttered.

"I'm merely asserting. We've a man——"

"On *The Mercury*," Michael said, scornful.

"An outside contributor. The fellow who does these occasional cartoons. He knows about the Trathbys. His father has an art business—enamelling, marquetry, banging brass, you know. Miss Trathbye used to be with him learning art embroidery."

Michael had a vision of Drusilla bending over an embroidery frame; light rimming the red hair, a foot peeping from under the long folds of a dimly blue gown, rosy finger-tips shining in and out of a mesh of pied silks.

"As an apprentice," Racie said, trying to shatter the picture. "She stayed only a year or so. Got work to do at home, or something, or her mother objected to her being in the shop. Quite rightly, no doubt: she's rather a striking-looking girl."

"Yes?" Michael said with an awful irony.

"Oh yes, I think so. Anyway, this fellow's father has known the Trathbys ever since they came to Glasgow. He boarded with them for a time: Mrs. Trathbye had a boarding-house in Lamb Street."

It was another attempt to fade the romance that, Racie suspected, was glowing in Michael's illusionable heart. Racie glanced up from the corner of his eye, looked down again, and went on :

"The Trathbyes used to have a lot of property in the South of Ireland, you know. There's a son there still. . . . They were rather a wild lot and they ran through everything they had. There's nothing left, it seems, but a row of cottages and a mill that won't work. The son takes after the mill. . . . Mrs. Trathbye found she wasn't equal to the boarding-house and retired."

"Poor lady!" Michael said. He had a pitiful vision of Drusilla's mother, a stately and beautiful woman in black velvet and pearls. It did not occur to him that such a costume was unsuited to a boarding-house in Lamb Street : nor did he know the price of black velvet.

"Umf. . . . They must be pretty hard up," Racie said. "Of course I don't know—it's not my business. Mrs. Trathbye may have something of her own and Miss Trathbye probably makes something by her work at home. And one of her sisters is in Cloagh's office—Cloagh the writer, you know. I saw her one day I was in on *Mercury* business—a half-grown girl, dark and very plump. I shouldn't have known she was Miss Trathbye's sister."

Michael was making a tunnel in the sand : he found a broken yellow shell and tried to balance it on his palm. If he had shown anger, outblazed into his characteristic invective against the base estimates of the world in general and *The Mercury* in particular, Racie would have felt that his tactics had been in some measure successful : but Michael's silence and

the smile that pouted his lips seemed to imply an impudent defiance of common-sense.

"About Miss Caroline Trathbye . . ." Racie said. "Who told you she'd do for *The Teller of Tales*? Patullo? Take my word for it, Mick, Patullo's an old fraud: he forgets his purse too often. . . . Well, never mind. Miss Caroline writes for *The Dublin Lady* and for *The Children's Guide* and *The Glasgow Northern News* and *The Lady's Circle*. She writes about frying fish and washing sun-bonnets; and she can't do even that grammatically. For mercy's sake, what do you think she's going to do on *The Teller of Tales*?"

"Well, I didn't mean she was to write for it itself," Michael said, foiled, "though I don't see how you can know she's incapable of it. . . . You always believe nothing's going to turn out right. What's the sense of going on that way? Uncle Claud knows other magazine people: he could get her a good position on a London paper any day he likes, or as secretary to somebody."

"She has the presence of an old china-woman," Racie murmured. He quailed before Michael's look of horror and took refuge in a little qualifying laugh.

"These generalisations are always vulgar," Michael said. . . . "And idiotic. China-women are like any other women. . . . China-women . . ."

"I didn't know you held a brief for china-women," Racie said. "Cheap, I suppose?"

"Fearfully cheap," Michael said. "What have her age and appearance to do with it? It's low, that sort of thing—it's abominable. . . . The one question is: 'Can she write?'"

"But she *can't*!" Racie cried, goaded into animation. "Haven't I been telling you she can't?" He

shut his eyes and monotoned : “ ‘ This dress would be charming in powder blue voile, but, between you and I, I incline to its expression in one of the modish ratines.’ . . . ‘ Bring to the boil and while boiling add the duck’s foot, and other ingredients.’ . . . That’s the sort of thing she’s been doing for half a century.”

Michael was laughing. Racie’s irresponsible wit always amused him.

“ Well, I don’t care,” he said. “ Uncle Claud knows all sorts of Press people : he can find her something to do in her own line. Not that I believe that it’s such a poor line as you say. I don’t believe an educated lady would write that sort of stuff.”

“ Educated lady ? ” Racie exclaimed. “ Educated people have to write what they’re paid for,” he muttered, retreating before the anger in Michael’s face.

“ I’ll go up to Glasgow with you to-morrow if you’ll have me,” Michael said repressively. “ I told Mrs. Trathbye I would call any day that Miss Caroline would like an interview. . . . Mrs. Trathbye very kindly asks me to go to-morrow and have tea with them.”

“ Oh, Lord,” Racie ejaculated. “ She has you on toast.”

Michael rose with an affectation of calmness and languor : he stood, brushing his clothes with a hand that trembled a little, and gazing out at the misty sea hardly defined from the misty sky. Farther along the shore there was a point of rocks, sculpted sandstone of soft hues of red and rose-colour ; and in one of the curves of this point two boats lay a-dream in a little bay of dim grey-blueness.

“ I’ll go for a row,” Michael said and left his friend.

Racie, smoking, watched the boat cleaving the soft shimmering of the sea. The cluck of the oars in the rowlocks came in a swift rhythm, then suddenly stopped. Michael, as his habit was, had shipped the oars and was lying in the bottom of the boat. One of his white-shod feet showed shadowily above the edge of the boat, rising and sinking with the slow pulse of the great drowsy sea. . . . Racie irritably shifted his position, screwing up his eyebrows, uttering a " 'Mf! " eloquent of a forced tolerance of an absurd standard.

He said to himself that, as a rule, he did not attempt to dissuade Michael Quentin from any folly contemplated. But this—was a bit different. . . . Yes : it was a bit different. Michael, as an active agent of his own crazes, possibly got little harm : indeed, he worked off blinding bedazzling vapours ; and emerged from each of his failures with at least a faint possibility that he would never make a fool of himself in that special way again. But in this affair, Michael was passive—in the hands of the Trathbys. The thing seemed very clear to Racie. Only a human being with an income like Michael's could remain blind to the fact that people would stick at nothing to get money. Racie had inhaled the idea that a woman always schemes to get her daughters married : he would not have said this in words, he had not formally thought it, and he had never before seen, nor looked for, an example of it in life : yet it was there, a vaguely termed, unquestioned dogma. Its corollary was that a son-in-law with money was hailed by the match-making mother—especially by the poor match-making mother—especially by the widowed poor match-making mother. . . .

Cunning creatures these widows ! Racie's news of

the Trathbyes had confirmed him in his view of them. He had a little disgust against cant about Irish openness of heart, Irish simplicity and improvidence. He had heard much of that sort of talk in the Eire Club and at the Mission Rooms, and knew how it was used to flatter, to move, to bedazzle and exploit. That did not matter much : Michael was already chilled by the meetings of the Eire Club and (Racie had hoped) would let the thing shiver to pieces soon. The sooner the better ! (he had said)—with that idiotic young Cowie constantly on his feet, and with old Patullo curiously off-hand and evasive about the amount of the subscriptions. . . . But now Racie foreboded a folly that might be more enduring and more destructive than the loss of a few pounds and the waste of a few evenings in petty annoyances.

The thing was very clear to him. Mrs. Trathbye (being a poor widow and a mother) was inevitably a match-maker ; and she was more of a match-maker than the average widowed mother of small income. She had come—some years ago, it is true, but still she *had* come—from the south or west of Ireland ; and she belonged, by birth and by marriage, to good hunting, hard-riding, and more or less hard-drinking families. Racie had heard people speak of Mrs. Trathbye as “ a perfect lady.” He knew what that meant. . . . She had certain graces of manner, possibly of appearance, the concomitants of conservatism, of a Victorian prudishness and helplessness. Irishmen of the “ good family ” country type were always at least a century behind the rest of Britain ; and they kept their womenkind in an obscurantism more deep than their own. The word “ womenkind ” in its mixture of a sort of tender skittishness with

mere animalism was in itself eloquent of the attitude of these people. "Womenkind" at home were contented to wheedle for money for dresses and jewels, to light the cigars of their husbands and fathers and brothers. "Womenkind" thrust into the world were frightened, ignorant, desperate creatures: their struggle for matrimony was fierce because marriage was the one career open to them, their single means of livelihood, their sole importance, their only triumph.

Mrs. Trathbye (and possibly the daughters) were womenkind. Racie surmised it. They knew that Michael Quentin was rich. It would require one meeting, or at most two, to show them that he was a fool. There was no guile in him: he would walk, with those staring, unseeing eyes of his, into the trap. After he was caught, he would deny that there had been any trap laid. When it was too late, the people might let the mask drop and their ugly duplicity glare out. Then Michael would cry out, in his perennial rage and astonishment. . . . But this time escape would not be possible.

The worst of it was (Racie must admit to himself) that the people's state was not altogether one of crude, flagrant beggary. They had something to offer that might tempt a man far less of a fool than Michael was, with senses far less easily quickened, with a love of beauty much less devout. Yes, they had something—hang them! The girl was beautiful. Racie had struggled against the admission: it came now in the presence of the undeniable unclaiming beauty of Nature. She was akin to that: she bore the test of it as a splendid line of poetry rings and vaunts in the brain unshattered by the voices of streams and trees. Her beauty rang true: there was in it something

primæval, a wonder of freshness, a glory of power, as there was in the dawn or in the opening of a rose. . . .

It was merely bodily. What signs had she given of a rare spirit, a warm heart, an alert brain? But Michael, having his senses appealed to, had let his imagination run riot in a very wilderness of illusions. Hang her! Hang them all! There was no doubt that the people knew how beautiful she was and were basing their hopes on her. Racie knew—for was not the air full of tales of match-making mothers fostering their girls' good looks, tending their tresses and complexions, insisting on regulations in rest and diet? Once at the Eire Club he had heard Miss Morland quiz Miss Trathbye on having to go early to bed "like a good little girl." There came a disquieting picture of Drusilla's face flushing at the impertinence—of the deepening and extending of the rose-colour in her cheeks, of the distressed soft eyes, the parted lips, so mournful and innocent. Confound her! Now Racie felt an exasperation that might have astonished him had he realised its energy. Michael Quentin was badly armoured for resisting the attacks of a wily, prudish, mercenary widow: but this weapon of beauty, placed in her hands, was in itself so dangerous to him that its use hardly needed the technique acquired by poverty, obscurantism, and widowhood. . . . Racie—still with that dogmatic vagueness of popular opinion—perceived that the other members of the family, physically and socially, deliberately sacrificed themselves to the preservation and advertisement of this girl's attractions. It was, no doubt, a matter tacitly understood rather than spoken of; but as much of a business venture as the action of a poor family who sent their clever boy to a university, hoping for general benefits

from his future prosperity. . . . The girl, though the eldest, did not go out to work as her sisters did. There was, of course, the probability that her good looks made it difficult—for her mother's Victorian ideas would find offences in the merest familiarities, good-natured and admiring. The girl could hardly—Racie reluctantly acknowledged it—could hardly walk about town alone without exciting stares from young, old, and middle-aged fools. Still, the family was poor: other poor girls, with fair faces and fine figures, had to go to business—why not this one? It was unlikely that she was kept at home to assist in the house. What else had the widow to do? What was the aunt there for with her scanty monthly columns? Racie did not believe that the girl worked in the house: her hands were white: he imagined her breakfasting in bed, being waited upon and petted like the spoiled beauty in a novel. Beauties were always spoiled: the world was soft and silly to them: the sun fell around them tenderly, and the wind blew upon them only to set free lovely little twists and curls of their hair.

Racie, looking out to the dim drowsing sea where the phantom-like white foot rose and fell with the boat, puffed a loud breath that was akin to a sigh. It would be an exaggeration to say that he took a vow to protect Michael with his money and his stupidity, against the Trathbyes' impecunious scheming: but it is certain that Racie's feelings came near to crystallising into such a resolve. He said to himself, rather excitedly, that he must affect to be completely indifferent. He was not going to contradict Michael into stubbornness by speaking against the Trathbyes: the best plan was to reduce them to insignificance.

He had really nothing to say against the people : they were, no doubt, justified from their own point of view. To offer the girl's beauty was a perfectly fair thing to do——

Not to Michael Quentin. None of the treatments that were applicable to other men were effective in his case. It was not fair even to leave him alone to make a fool of himself. He was too divinely foolish.

Michael, on his back in the bottom of the boat, was gazing up at the sleepy sky. Behind the blue-grey veil something struggled and strove, something bright and eternal waited. It was glorious to lie there and see the faint suffusion of light in the mist. Michael had often thought, watching for dawn, that he would not lose a moment of the time of expectancy when Night was still reluctant to yield to Day : he knew so well the wonder that was coming : it was enchantment to wait, lulled into inertia by the very hope and rapture.

What need was there for men to rush onward in the search for God ? God came. Why cut short the time of hoping and praying and dreaming, the waiting for His footstep and the rustle of His garment ?

What need was there to wrong Love by haste ? Love was a jealous God. Let him have his full meed of expectation, of trust, of prayers and fears and hopes. Let him have sufferings, too, to lay at her feet, tears, dumb dreads and despairs, reverences in which a man did not ask to lift the veil but was content to kneel, loving the brightness that suffused it. . . . Oh, the baseness, the stupidity of not rejoicing in Love's probation, in not glorying in Love's blind faith in that other soul hidden behind its veil ! . . . Love would come—Love would come.

II

Drusilla's feeling, when she heard that Michael Quentin was coming to tea, was an overpowering one of dismay. She had no energy to spare for mere anger or annoyance: she felt helpless, as in the presence of a catastrophe.

She had known, of course, that her mother had overheard all of Patullo's offer. Even had this not been so, Drusilla had an honesty which had nothing to do with principle, which was easily conquered by her timidity, but took little account of possible dangers. She would have told her mother about Patullo's offer, foreseeing that it might lead to humiliating dealings with Michael Quentin: but in her surmises, the worst that could have come of it would have been the submission of one of Aunt Caroline's columns and an absurd letter to the editor of *The Teller of Tales*; then disappointment. The Trathbyes never expected anything else.

But on Aunt Caroline's return from the garden-party, Mrs. Trathbye had risen from her sick-bed and come into the kitchen. Clothed in a dressing-gown of a greyish blue colour, and with a crimson Shetland wool shawl swathed about her head and face, she moved with a characteristic grace and stateliness; taking the tray of cups and saucers from Drusilla's hands and herself laying the table; replacing the brown loaf by a white one; taking away the spoons and scornfully polishing them; practising a score of other base little irritations, vulgar little self-assertions. Mrs. Trathbye's cheeks were hot and her eyes glistened: she was ostentatiously friendly to Aunt Caroline; and she talked eagerly of Patullo's

suggestions—striving, it seemed to Drusilla, to lose sight of the scene in the hall. Drusilla, with the rings left by the weeping round her eyes, was piteous, too miserable to interfere in the plans of the two women. Essie, coming in laughing, with a mischievous mouth, seemed delightfully natural and wholesome, and did much to lay the horror that had looked from their mother's eyes.

A day later Drusilla had noticed, on the hall table, a letter addressed in her aunt's handwriting to Michael Quentin. Aunt Caroline's writing, pale and spidery, was in itself an offence. A fury urged Drusilla to tear the letter, to burn it, to lie about it: any means of saving her place in Michael's opinion seemed justifiable. But the letter continued to lie in a pale inviolability and later was carried to the post. Michael's reply was discussed by Mrs. Trathbye and Aunt Caroline, by Essie and Kathleen. They would have told Drusilla everything if she had asked, but she would ask nothing. She saw that another letter was despatched, and wondered, in a dreadful sore shame, what they were doing. It was mean of them to be making use of her friends at whom they had sneered in hostility: it was insolent: it was cruel. They ought to have known more about her feelings towards Michael than to be bruising her heart in this way. Her mother ought to have understood.

Mrs. Trathbye laughed with pleasure when she received Michael's acceptance of her invitation. She was hospitable and her chances of playing the hostess were rare.

"Girls, he's coming to tea on Friday."

"Well, I hope you'll be able to get something for tea," Essie said, quizzing her mother. "*I can't give*

you any more money." She earned the largest salary and was beginning to be critical of the management of the house. She had been for the last three months in a big office, where there were many other girls, and the influence of their merriment and their talk about clothes was beginning to show in Essie. Her work was of increased importance, satisfying in some measure her self-esteem. She was blither, gentler, less morbidly domineering. Now and then a certain sympathy with Drusilla peeped forth, a disposition, faint and erratic, to side with her sister against the insane contradictions and censures of Aunt Caroline and Mrs. Trathbye. . . . Essie's hair, of a lighter brown than Kathleen's, was done carefully rather than becomingly, and she was beginning to dress well. Kathleen, in a sleepy office with one old man in it, wore a clumsy blouse and skirt and collars with holes in them.

"Ah, I'm not asking you for money!" Mrs. Trathbye said, reproachful. "I'm not going to make any pretence of having anything more than usual."

"Of course not," Essie said, sarcastic. She glanced over the table on which there were two platefuls of food, one of bread, the other of farthing biscuits. The Trathbys, very clean in their habits, were obliged to economise in the matter of table-linen. The cloth was of a greyish tinge with tea-stains here and there.

"I'll be responsible for the tea," Aunt Caroline said, very dignified. "It's me he's coming to see."

Mrs. Trathbye bubbled with laughter.

"Is he good-looking?" she asked Drusilla. "He might take a fancy to your aunt."

"Dillie's got idiotic ideas about people's looks," Kathleen growled.

"You needn't be so beastly," Essie said. Life in her big office was teaching her the charms of badinage : she was becoming conscious that at home the man question was treated too gravely and bitterly. Her mother even, with her freakish moods of jesting, would joke only about cases which were impossible.

"Why shouldn't he take a fancy to one of us?" Essie said. "To Dillie or me?"

Mrs. Trathbye glanced quickly from Kathleen to Drusilla : the laughter faded from her face. "Well . . . there's your chance, Kathleen," she said. Her voice was artificial, and Kathleen rose in resentment. The girl, plain and clumsy in her juvenile dress, felt in a half-comprehending way that it was to her lack of charms that she owed her mother's favouritism.

At night Drusilla lay beside Essie and thought. It was Tuesday and Michael was to come on Friday. She must find some means of preventing it : she regretted that she had not destroyed Aunt Caroline's first letter : she thought feverishly of writing a note to Michael cancelling the invitation ; of sending him a telegram with news of an illness in the house. No : that would be found out. . . . She must do something. She imagined the scene of the tea-party ; the table laden with the good china, and the silver, the "tea-bread" and cake, the bread and butter, which on important occasions Kathleen was always asked to cut, which she cut so thickly and raggedly ; the hot fire, Mrs. Trathbye's ideal of evening comfort in summer as in winter ; the shining of Essie's face, the deepening crimson of Kathleen's. She imagined Aunt Caroline, fussing, interrupting, contradicting,

pressing Michael to eat ; the clearing of the table with everybody in the relief of motion getting into everybody's else's way ; Mrs. Trathbye going to the piano and singing duets with Kathleen, thrusting sulky cynical Kathleen on the visitor's notice. . . .

It was not bearable. The singular thing was that up till now Drusilla had believed that her family, deliberately social, must make a rather pleasant impression. She had even pictured an evening with Alick Cowie as a guest, charmed by her mother. The good china was pretty and old, and she had not before felt that there was anything shameful in her mother's pride in it. The silver, glittering beyond a bunch of flowers, the stiff, shining folds of the "good" tablecloth, the unusual abundance of food, were pleasant to her senses. If you got a seat at the far side of the table the fire was not intolerable. Mrs. Trathbye sang prettily : it did not matter very much about Kathleen, nor about Essie's piece, "Betsy and I are out," which she recited. People were accustomed to girls doing things badly. . . . It did not matter very much about Aunt Caroline so long as she was in a fairly good temper and kept out of the room most of the time. She had a habit of staying in the kitchen so that visitors might think that she was the main-spring of the household. Poor Aunt Caroline ! With Cowie there as a guest, Drusilla would have smiled at her oddities.

But what was good enough for Cowie, what would have been taken for granted by him, no, what would have pleased and impressed him, seemed ridiculously vile and incongruous in relation to Michael Quentin. Drusilla thought of Michael's cultured voice, of his hands, his serious eyes, of the books that he read, the

things of which he spoke. Oh, it was cruel to disgrace her before Michael Quentin ! In her helplessness she began to sob, and Essie, turning impatiently by her side, asked :

“ What’s wrong ? Are you dreaming ? ”

“ Yes—it was something like a bad dream anyway,” Drusilla replied with a feverish laugh.

“ Well, I wish to goodness you’d be quiet and let me sleep. Every one can’t lie in bed in the morning. . . . ”

“ There it is again,” Drusilla thought with a kind of amusement. For it was strange how unreal her thoughts on the Wage-earning Problem seemed to her now. She would not have tolerated platitudes about a sound financial basis or her duty to her family. Her interests clashed fiercely with theirs in this matter. Let them go down with their fustian notions ! She knew that Michael and she were right, dwellers on the plane of realities, where beauty and refinement and the truths of Life and Death that men call Poetry were appraised at their true value. She said to herself savagely that she had a right to be ashamed, even of her mother. . . . She found herself praying, childishly asking God to keep Michael from coming.

It seemed like a partial answer to her prayer when Aunt Caroline, the most sore of her disgraces, had a bad cold on Thursday. On Friday she was so much worse that she must be put to bed in Mrs. Trathbye’s room. Mrs. Trathbye, not sorry, seized on the laundried cloth, on the bags of food that poor Caroline had bought, on the silver that she had polished. There was elaborate cleaning of the house, the setting of a fire in the sitting-room, the donning of dresses.

The gas-lamp in the hall was lighted and the flame kept low till Michael rang.

Mrs. Trathbye, with a slish ! of skirts, rushed to the door. Drusilla had risen and sat down in annoyance : she heard her mother's social tones of voice, gracious, gentle, with a kind of old-world courtesy. The sounds fell soothingly, and she smiled as she remembered her own childish saying that her mother speaking to a visitor always made her think of country-houses with peacocks and terraces. She looked into the mirror in the overmantel and saw her broad shoulders in her best white muslin blouse, the pink bow at her throat, the loveliness of her face and head. She fluttered a glance over the pretty tea-table, the lamp-lit and shadowed artful cosiness of the room, the figures of Essie and Kathleen, white-bloused and with twinkling beaded slippers.

Michael came in and she offered him her hand timidly. Mrs. Trathbye talked, for she had never encouraged the girls to be more than monosyllabic to visitors. Aunt Caroline's cold was discussed ; then her journalism. Mrs. Trathbye thanked Michael, very warmly, for his kindness ; and Michael, colouring charmingly, said :

“ Oh, please . . . ”

Patullo's idea that Drusilla should obtain journalistic work had up till now been ignored. It was therefore with a blush of surprise that she heard her mother say, laughingly :

“ Mr. Patullo was suggesting that Dillie should try something of the kind : but I'm afraid it needs more perseverance than she has. She hasn't the patience to stick long to any one thing.”

Michael's eyes met Drusilla's and he smiled ; and

suddenly, with happy eyes, she was responding to the smile, resting in it as in the tenderness of sunshine. Her rage at her mother's artificial good-nature, at the false impression deliberately given, fell down into nothingness as rapidly as it had flickered up: she did not want to explain to Michael for she felt that they were understanding each other about deep things—real things, the only things that had power.

At tea, Mrs. Trathbye asked Michael about his Irish blood, and, sighing, told him about Croaghnaill and about poor John—telling him much that was new to him and, indeed, to the girls themselves. Michael, listening, gazing into Mrs. Trathbye's face, was trying to reconstruct it in its bloom of firm flesh and unwithered skin. Certainly she resembled Drusilla, he had thought at first sight: but the likeness wavered, vanished, reappeared till, at the end of the evening, he called himself an idiot for having imagined that it existed. Yet in his mental pictures of Mrs. Trathbye in Ireland he painted her rather like Drusilla—a fair-haired Drusilla, less tall, less radiant. . . . The other girls were altogether unlike her: they must inherit from their father.

Mrs. Trathbye refused Drusilla's help to clear away the tea-things. "Kathleen's my right hand," Mrs. Trathbye said to Michael; and Kathleen, in her thick short skirt with her hanging plait and her curious air of elderliness, went stolidly in and out with the tray. Drusilla, ashamed of her imputed uselessness, shot a glance at Michael; and again she found him looking at her with visionary eyes and she rested in the look with a feeling that she was understood and comforted, that the reproach was taken

away from her, that she was being lifted up into a place of freedom and truthful seeing. Nothing else mattered. Her shames and terrors of the last few days and nights had shrivelled like vapours in the sunlight.

Mrs. Trathbye played and sang. She explained to Michael, with motherly indulgent laughter, that Drusilla had no ear and that a number of music-lessons had been wasted upon her. It was not worth while saying "When?" in anger at this lie, which her mother half believed. Drusilla sat contentedly while her mother and Kathleen sang and Essie said her "piece." Michael asked her no questions about her accomplishments: he hardly spoke to her: when he stood up to go the words that had passed between them were no more than could have been remembered by a casual listener. . . . Yet Drusilla felt very happy.

"Turn down that gas!" Mrs. Trathbye said, as the hall-door closed: the girls paid no attention, for they had run to the window to see Michael emerge from the close. Essie, smiling, defined in the lighted window, waved to him as he looked up. Kathleen, sunned out of her sulkiness by her mother's advertisements, by the singing of her song, and especially by an evening spent in the company of a young man, waved too, hot-faced and giggling. Drusilla felt that they were guilty of a profanity: she suddenly went from the window and put out the lamp-light.

"Ah, don't be doing a thing like that and me just going to the cupboard," Mrs. Trathbye said plaintively at the door. "Jealous just because your sisters are getting more attention than you are—it

isn't nice. . . . Come away and help me with the tea-things."

Drusilla went; glad that her mother had asked her, happy, too blissfully, unreasonably confident to resent the effrontery of the obviously conscious misrepresentation.

"It's all very well to be having all these things to-night," Mrs. Trathbye said blithely in the kitchen, as Essie began to eat a bun. "We'll suffer for it at the end of the week." She folded the left-over food in a napkin. . . . "Isn't it an extraordinary thing that Mr. Patullo hasn't given me back my two shillings?"

"Perhaps he means to keep it," Drusilla said, laughing. It did not occur to Mrs. Trathbye that the thing was possible. Mr. Patullo was a person to be taken seriously; a man, an old gentleman with a courtly bow and an immense circle of friends. His rather evident poverty did not influence Mrs. Trathbye and Aunt Caroline, in whose minds respectability and shabbiness were not dissociated. The girls—especially Essie, who was successful in business—had inhaled something of the spirit of the city: they turned instinctively from the claim made by Patullo's bent, seedy body and pitiable movements.

"Ah, he'll remember it, poor man," Mrs. Trathbye said kindly. Neither she nor Aunt Caroline would have treated a stranger with the least indelicacy in such a matter: yet they obstreperously reminded each other of debts of a few pence.

Mrs. Trathbye, carefully wiping the china, which she had brought with her from Ireland, looked up at her daughter in a strange, tentative, half-afraid way.

"I was rather disappointed in Mr. Quentin,"

Mrs. Trathbye said. "He has an impediment—you didn't tell us that, Dillie. He isn't at all good-looking?"

It was a question, but failed to be provocative. Drusilla looked with happy confident eyes into her mother's: her speech was quite calm, quite sincere.

"He looks very nice sometimes," she said.

Mrs. Trathbye's eyes were averted. "Your aunt will have to stay in my room to-night," she said, "so Kathleen and I must make up a bed in the parlour."

Michael, walking in his rapid yet dreaming way, was thinking of the *stuff* that Racie had hinted about the Trathbyes. They were charming, refined women, witty and playful to each other. Their voices and laughter, full of western music, had delighted him. Mrs. Trathbye's accent was almost purely Irish: she was evidently a creature curiously unadaptable, idyllically simple in her point of view. The girls' speech had been modified by their early removal to Glasgow: but their vocabulary kept many Irish words and their soft voices slid naturally into the rise and fall that Michael performed by conscious practice. . . . They did not seem to be very poor at all: the house was very pretty, he thought, clean and dainty: the china was beautiful, and he remembered a glow and glitter as of gold and silver and quantities of flowers. No detail was very clear in his memory, but there was an abiding sense of sweet femininity, of the absence of the masculine side of life with its grosser needs. How kind they had been to him! It was all so little, their life, so pure and gentle, so quaint in its prejudices and timidities. It had made him very happy to see Drusilla at home. She had showed him her

books and once or twice their hands had touched. She had spoken of going to Mass and this supposed revelation of her church had made her seem more than ever the incarnation of the spirit of Ireland. She came to him as it were to bring him back to his own country, the lost spiritual home of which the green Ireland of earth was only the symbol. "Rosaleen," Michael said to himself, "Rosaleen . . ." Racie was not there to remind him that Rosaleen was dark, and Michael went on :

*"I could scale the blue air :
I could plough the high hills.
Oh, I could kneel all night in prayer
To heal your many ills . . ."*

Many ills ? Somehow he thought suddenly of that note of expectancy in her voice.

Expectancy of what ? Not, surely, of deliverance from woes, but only of the untried life to come, of the sure slow steps of Love ; only a waiting without wistfulness. For the barriers about this princess were soft and sweet, all of roses.

Michael saw two figures on the pavement a little distance in front of him—the figure of a boy scurrying along and the figure of a man, half dragged by him, staggering in his wake. The movement suggested something different from drunkenness. Michael, hastening up to him, saw old Patullo.

Patullo was lurching, his knees bent : he stared heavily at Michael and his voice came, quiet, with a dreadful kind of patience.

"I've had bad news, Mr. Quentin," Patullo said.

III

Not far from the Eire Club Mission Rooms there was a poor respectable street called Seymour Road, lined for some distance with tenements of shops and houses, then with hoardings and yards and an aged square house or two set in a grass-plot among trees. Seymour Road ended at the wall of White-meadow Cemetery—an old grey wall on which lichens grew and over which the tips of white obelisks showed.

Old Patullo, with Michael and the breathless boy, stopped at the first of the square houses—a black block divided now into half a dozen little dwellings. A street lamp opposite showed the iron railings and gate, the withering trees and the long dirty grass. A clothes-line was stretched between the railings and one of the trees, and pale garments wavered in the darkness.

There was a movement close beside them and a woman in a heavy shawl came up to Patullo.

“He found yez all right then?” she said. “He’s a good boy.”

Michael recognised her deep, tender voice: it was Mrs. Quinn, who came to the meetings at the club rooms, bringing the little boy, Miss Morland’s favourite.

“I couldn’t get a clear account from him,” Patullo said in a curious, pleading, bullying way. “What is it? How’s he now?”

“Ah, God help you—the wee cratur’s gone,” Mrs. Quinn said. “God help you, Mr. Patullo.”

They went round the house by a narrow path, damp and smelling of flower-pots, and mounted a flight of stairs at the back. A wash of light came from a

muslin-curtained window, and Michael looked at Mrs. Quinn's face as he always did when she came to the club-rooms. It was a face of noble lines, pure-browed, with a wearied pallor: the dark grey eyes were singularly honest and gentle. She was speaking to the boy, commending him for his quickness.

"Run away now like a good boy, and God bless you."

The room they entered was full of clothes—coats, dresses, and cloaks hanging from the walls, hats and boots stacked on shelves. Michael remembered that Mrs. Quinn, an industrious and fairly well-to-do woman, was in the old-clothes trade. He looked round, wondering who had worn those garments, what pretty girls had smiled from under the crushed, dusty hats or snuggled into the wraps. There was one hat somewhat like the brown one that Drusilla had worn.

"Where? . . ." Michael heard Patullo say.

"He's beyant in the bedroom, Mr. Patullo. But come into the kitchen first. Ah then, come." There was none of the common ghoulisn delight in details of death and sickness: Mrs. Quinn silently led Patullo to a chair in the sparkling little kitchen, crammed with furniture. There was a shelf full of children's books, a little chair in a corner, a rocking-horse. Patullo, staring at them all, sat down. Mrs. Quinn moved a hissing kettle to the middle of the hot glittering range; then, looking at Michael and compressing her lips, went out into the passage. Michael stood beside her, passive, as if in a dream, staring at the shut door of the bedroom.

"Ye'd like to . . . ?" Mrs. Quinn said, and opened it. Michael saw another little room, stuffed with furniture, with white woolly rugs on the carpeted

floor, with pink and blue vases on the chimney-piece, with a child's cot beside the aggressive brass bedstead. The cot was empty and the body of the little boy, brown-haired and smiling, was laid on the bed and covered with a thick white quilt.

"I knew you were fond of the wee cratur," Mrs. Quinn said, as if to justify her action in showing the dead boy.

The words and the moving sight roused Michael. He began to reason—to link Patullo's overwhelmment with the child's death. Patullo must have known the child—got to care about him. . . . How? Patullo had never to his knowledge come to the Mission Rooms.

"An' the pleasure he tuk in your stories an' your singin' and dancin'. . . . Ah, goodness gracious!" Mrs. Quinn said. "It will be quare an sorry Miss Morland will be."

Miss Morland? Michael tried to understand what she had to do with it. He remembered that it was Patullo who had first recommended Miss Morland, that Miss Morland was an old friend of Patullo, had been coached by him before her teaching days. . . . The thing did not seem more clear.

"H-how did the little boy die?" Michael stammered.

"It was pewnoma, Mr. Quentin. He got worse, an' us thinking it was only a cold. I'd sent word to Miss Morland, but she was away in London on some Votes for Women business. She does a lot of that: she's quare and clever. . . . Come into the kitchen, Mr. Quentin, and have a cup of tea."

"N-no, thank you," Michael answered, suddenly horribly oppressed. "I'll wait outside—will you tell him?"

Outside rain had begun to fall : the eaves dripped and the dead leaves on the flags whispered and whistled. Michael walked to the front gate and stared along the shimmering road with its blurred lamp-gleams to where the white ghostly obelisks peeped over the cemetery wall.

In a surprisingly short time Patullo came behind him.

"I must apologise for keeping you waiting, Mr. Quentin."

"Let's walk," Michael said abruptly, to signify that time was not precious to him. He had lost the stupefied feeling produced by the swift transition from his dreams of a Maeterlinck princess among roses to this picture of Seymour Road with its stone-cutter's yards and insanitary houses. The whole thing had seemed unreal, a ghostly vision contrasting with the vivid hues of his dream. But now his heart leaped out to old Patullo : he was all alert in his longing to understand, to help and comfort. He prayed as they trudged along the dreary road in the wind and rain ; and suddenly Patullo spoke :

"I suppose you've guessed he was my own child, Mr. Quentin."

A long silence.

"N-no ! I didn't—I didn't know," Michael faltered.

"He was nearly seven," Patullo said in his cultured voice. "His mother drinks. I took him away from her four years ago, but I couldn't keep him with me at my flat. There were my pupils to consider——" Patullo's voice faded away with a suggestion of deceit and he glanced up at Michael—"They'd have passed remarks. . . . She made horrible scenes—I should have been afraid of her coming up and making scenes."

"I'm sorry," Michael said, deeply touched by the thing that Patullo had left unsaid. His own drunkenness, too, was a spectacle that the child must not see.

"I did my best for him," Patullo said. "Mrs. Quinn's a good woman. She used to come round our way to do business with my wife. She—it's a horrible thing to tell, Mr. Quentin, but it's true—she used to sell her clothes, and mine, and things in the house, to buy . . . intoxicants . . . when I refused to give her money."

"How awful," Michael said as Patullo paused appealingly.

"I hadn't very much money to give, you see, Mr. Quentin," Patullo said, "though I was doing fairly well then. . . . That sort of thing damaged me very much with my pupils."

"Of course," Michael said. "So it would indeed."

"You know how you'd feel yourself," Patullo said. "How any young gentleman would feel. And parents don't like sending their sons and daughters to a house where there's anything of that sort. It got to be distinctly unpleasant and disgraceful and at last we were obliged to have separate establishments. . . . I did my best for the child. We"—Patullo cleared his throat—"moved in a rather narrow circle. I had got rather cut off from my friends since my marriage. . . . I have a woman who comes up to 'do for' me in my flat in Lochaber Gardens—a most respectable woman; but she's not the kind of person I could have trusted with the boy. It wouldn't have been a proper life for a child at the most susceptible period of his life when the young idea is just beginning to shoot." Patullo smiled weakly. "I did my best for him. I felt I was bound to remove him from his home

influences. He had to attend school with rather uncouth little specimens—but, bless me, Mr. Quentin, that's the true democratic spirit."

"I wish I'd been sent to a poor school," Michael said earnestly.

"Why, there you are!" Patullo exclaimed, gratified. "I've heard people of the best position express just your opinion, Mr. Quentin—people who had me down to their country seats and used to send me motoring and yachting with their sons. . . . He'd picked up one or two queer expressions, but Miss Morland would soon have got him out of that: she had him up often. . . . Mrs. Quinn was fond of him and she's more real refinement than the average nurse or nursery governess."

Michael made a gesture disavowing the need for apologies. The thing that filled his heart with surprise and dismay was the normality of Patullo in his grief. His voice was a little changed: but there was no difference in his manner nor in his face. He shambled along, girt about with a kind of unapproachableness by his commonplaceness—Patullo the tutor, with a certain pedantic niceness of diction, with humble black coat-tails hanging over his thin legs, with his tobacco-stained forefinger and his alcohol-laden breath. Michael felt baffled by this dreary patience which accepted sorrow and failure as things of course. He fell into a silence which Patullo tried to break by courteous little remarks about the neighbourhood, the growth of picture palaces, and the Insurance Bill. His steps began to lag lamentably and Michael feared that they must soon board a car and cast away his chance to speak.

"Mr. Patullo——" he began, frantic.

Patullo was very sensitive : he stood still, looking at Michael with eyes nervously emotional.

"Mr. Patullo, it's awfully difficult for me to speak," Michael said. "I c-can't make people understand. It's funny—I think there must be something wrong with my vocabulary." He made a leaping movement towards Patullo, who, about to contradict him, stopped in a startled state. "I'm awfully sorry," Michael said. "It's so kind of you to have told me . . . about things. Will you tell me if I can do anything to help you . . . anything at all?"

"You're exceedingly kind, Mr. Quentin," Patullo said, walking on with downcast eyes.

"Nothing? . . . It's hard on me then," Michael said. "That's always the way with me : I want to help people : I don't seem able to get doing it. It must be my own fault : I can't have enough of sympathy to be able to give them the things they really want. I must be just filling a place and grabbing and getting my good out of other people's pain—just all the things I imagine I'm living to condemn."

"Mr. Quentin . . . it's not true," Patullo said agitatedly. He turned and began to walk slowly back over the road that they had traversed. "You do yourself less than justice, Mr. Quentin," Patullo said in his formal tones. "Believe me, I have seen a good many young men develop and—I may say it without flattery, Mr. Quentin—I have never seen one with parts to equal yours or with a disposition better calculated to . . . endear him to his fellows."

"Well, then," Michael said, pleased and blushing, "tell me if I can do anything. . . . Now or at any time? . . . Anything?"

He slipped his arm under Patullo's, tightly clutching

the black sleeve. It was piteous that Patullo, at his time of life, should have no overcoat, or at least no one at home to tell him to put on his overcoat.

It was rather disappointing that Patullo's arm made no response : but Michael kept his hold. They passed a hoarding, a patchwork of colours in the splashes of light from the street lamps : a girl's face, wide-mouthed and huge-eyed, laughed over a heathery landscape and cattle-piece advertising a beef extract. Michael found his mind yielding to the idea of this poster's suggestion of the glories of earth and sky and living creatures used by each man for the extraction of his own little commodity. . . . They saw, where the hoarding ended, a stone-cutter's yard with pale glistening angular shapes of granite and marble ; and far off similar pale shapes, shadowed in the night, were peeping over the cemetery wall.

"I haven't money to bury him decently," Patullo said hoarsely, in a low voice that was shocked and ashamed.

"*Oh . . .*"

"There's money owing to me—several pounds that I ought to get in a day or two," Patullo said, with more of his usual manner. "In fact it's overdue. I never like to press people. . . . I could ask them to give me credit only they might be unpleasant and, in a thing like this, it isn't seemly." He was again artlessly pathetic.

"Oh !" Michael said in horror and pity. That people should have to think about money in connection with such a thing ! . . . He saw the poor streets of the city in a dreadful illumination : thousands of little homes, unprotected, always on the verge of destruction ; thousands of funerals toiling to and fro

in rain and fog or in sunshine. Sometimes there was a black box under the carriage and the poor mourners rode above their dead. Sometimes the coffin was carried in the hinder part of a hideous coach of two compartments. Once, going round with Racie, who was writing his specials for *The Weekly Mercury*, Michael had seen a red-eyed man walking in and out of crowds with a two-foot-long coffin in his arms. . . .

"Mr. Patullo, let me lend you—take it from me—take it. Will you? Do, for God's sake! . . . I'm sick of this nonsense! Why on the living earth should one human being refuse anything another wants to do for him?"

Patullo looked at the tears falling down Michael's face, then lowered his eyes and walked on. Michael felt in his pocket for his sovereign-purse, in another pocket for notes.

"There . . . I don't know how much you need for things like that: but *please* don't count it—don't remember it or try to make it go far. It's awful you should have to bother. Tell me to-morrow and I'll give you more. You'll want to get carriages and flowers . . . and silver mounts on the . . . thing. And you'll want to take him to some nice place, out in the country. . . ."

Patullo's fingers closed over the dark paper notes with the little hard lump of the sovereigns folded in their midst. They turned and went towards the car station.

"I was looking for an undertaker's," said Patullo, who kept peering about. "I think there is one down that side street—I see a lighted window. Yes."

"May I come to see you to-morrow?" Michael asked, one foot on the car. "Good night."

“ Good night. Thank you,” Patullo said. There was a solemn stateliness in his manner as if he were taking part in some noble ceremonial.

Before Michael reached Mrs. Wylie’s, he had formed a plan for endowing a Burial Society. It amazed him that he had not had this idea before. He would engage a number of secret officials who would go here and there finding out poor people whose beloved dead were in danger of being buried parochially. The great difficulty was to avoid the appearance of patronage. Michael had the fear, too, that in yielding to the mourners’ wishes in the matters of black plumes and wreaths of immortelles, he might be retarding progress by fostering false standards of æstheticism. Yet what could one do ? One could not talk about the poetry of burial by fire to beings who shuddered at the bogey-word “ cremation.” One could not make real the ugliness of blacks to mourners whose anguish of inarticulateness must vent itself in a swathing of sombre clothes. . . . Michael, with a regretful thought of Rollo, began to plan his House for the Dead : he sought for appropriate lines to have carved in the entablatures, and remembered Spenser’s :

*. . . In seemlie sort their corses to engrave,
And deck with daintie flowers their brydall bed
That to their heavenly spouse both sweet and brave
They might appear when He their souls should save.*

*The wondrous workmanship of God’s own mould
Whose face he made all beasts to fear and gave
All in his hand even dead we honour should.
Ah, dearest God, me graunt I dead be not defouled !*

As the lines swept, musical, through his being, he again remembered Rollo ; dead at the beginning of their swift, sure friendship, which had seemed in truth to continue, not to commence. Michael had often fancied that Rollo's spirit lurked about The Corner House, that his voice might be heard calling from room to room. In the white studio, Michael had often prayed for the soul of his friend wandering in unknown places.

The vision of the room came back to him—the searching light, the roses, the rood. Lately he had had book-shelves put up and had filled them with books specially bound in white—collections of myths, the great theosophical works of H. P. Blavatsky and Annie Besant, the poems of Francis Thompson and W. B. Yeats, the lives of many Romanist saints, the Bible, and Thomas à Kempis. He thought now with anger of the cost of this fad, which had not improved the room, which had detracted somewhat from the austerity which was its key-note. Nearly a hundred pounds for white books while people, in side streets, woebegone, were struggling for shillings to pay for black clothes. The white books were beautiful and the black garments ugly. What of that ? Let them fling their ugliness, shriekingly, in the face of the heartless world.

The figure of Thomas Patullo, like a doleful strike-leader, seemed to emerge from the sorrowful black crowd. Michael felt keenly grateful to Patullo : he at least had not shown the cruel contempt of the respectable poor for a helpless young man of great possessions. Patullo—Michael thought, with a warming of the heart—would let him do more. He would go to see Patullo next day.

The Trathbyes' hall door was opposite to Patullo's on the same landing. Drusilla might come out ? Mrs. Trathbye might come out and ask him to come in. . . .

Ah ! He would bring a book for Miss Trathbye. Had she read Spenser ?

He saw two boys considering him and wondered if he had murmured the lines of Spenser aloud. Suddenly self-conscious, he hurried wincingly from their sight : he was sure that one of them said :

“ Loonie.”

CHAPTER V

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

I

DRUSILLA, with an anxious glance at the door, opened her writing-case. It was full of written sheets, and she scanned them, critical of their neatness rather than of the style and matter of the composition. At the top of the first page she had written: "The Choice of Colours in Dress."

The article seemed quite as good as most things that she had read in women's papers: it was much better than Aunt Caroline's columns, she thought: she had been told in the art shop that she had a wonderful eye for colour; and she spent a great deal of her spare time considering the windows of dress-makers and milliners, and in imagination correcting faults in their colour-schemes.

She pictured her article in print in *The Glasgow Newsboy* and the coming of a cheque—for ten shillings or even a pound? She would give it to her mother, who would be surprised and (she hoped) pleased. Aunt Caroline was not well: the cold lingered in her defenceless little system. Mrs. Trathbye spoke of calling in a doctor—"But ah, goodness gracious, how are we going to pay a doctor's bill?"

Michael's uncle had written a courteous letter, promising to keep Miss Caroline Trathbye in mind, but as yet nothing had followed Drusilla's attempt at journalism, begun secretly in defiance and assuming the air of a philanthropic undertaking.

She was going to steal across and show the sheets to Mr. Patullo, who had so kindly offered to point out faults. His advice seemed very sensible : it was true that any one could write. Drusilla would have preferred needlework, and thought with an ever-recurrent throe of the shining studio above the art shop, the odours of stains and polishes, the hollow sound of her needle plunging deftly through the tightly stretched stuff in her embroidery-ring. The manager, fair-bearded and courteous, had looked at her with kind eyes : so had the lame young man who did brass-work. . . .

Drusilla put on her hat and took a volume of H. G. Wells that Cowie had lent her. ("His ideas aren't practicable, of course," Cowie had said. "You can't change human nater. Still, it'll do you no harm to get acquainted with him : I've learned a lot from him myself"—with that air of granting a certificate at which Drusilla always laughed, delightfully quizzical and friendly.) She must go into the park and read so as to explain her absence ; and must slip into Patullo's flat as softly as possible, trusting to being unheard by her mother and Aunt Caroline. For the rest, the idea of reading in the park was a pleasant one : the September day, following the wet night of Michael's visit, was beautiful, a glory of blue sky, of dazzling clouds, of white sunlight and violet shadows. Drusilla often went there with Amy Cartwright, who lived in the flat below. She felt happy as she shut her own hall-door, and, after a pause of half-mirthful listening, tapped timidly at Patullo's door.

There was an irresponsive silence within the house, and she ventured another tap. Then she started as she heard some one enter the close below.

"Oh bother!" Drusilla exclaimed. "These Glasgow tenements are so fussy: the stairs are never free from people for a minute at a time." The Trathbye girls had inherited from their mother a dogma that they were not at home in a Glasgow tenement but had really spent the greater part of their lives in a large ancestral house in Galway. "My girls are well behaved because they were brought up in the country," Mrs. Trathbye sometimes said almost in good faith; and she and Aunt Caroline were full of reminiscences of old jests and adventures "at home at Croaghnaill"—referred to so often that the girls' minds had long ago yielded to the implication that they too looked back to Croaghnaill as an unfaded reality. Drusilla, in her nervous state, stood haughtily as the steps mounted the stairs. They were like a man's steps, big, noisy, and slouching.

"Oh . . ." Drusilla, swirling round, saw Miss Morland. The terror of Grace's loud voice made the girl's face whiten.

"What are you doing here?" Grace's manner was coarse, there was a revolting fury of suspicion in her eyes.

"Be quiet," Drusilla said, disgusted. "Don't shout, please, Grace. I don't want them to know I'm here." She glanced towards the Trathbyes' door.

"Why not? What business have you here? . . . What are you looking so terrified for?"

"I wish you'd be quiet," Drusilla repeated. "If you want to see me will you go downstairs and wait? I'm going into the park. . . . I want to see Mr. Patullo about something he promised to do."

"What could he promise to do for *you*?" Grace shouted.

Drusilla was moved partly by her timidity, partly by her lingering sense of discipleship ; chiefly by the gentleness that was in her making it impossible for her to armour herself in contempt. Her knowledge of the source of Grace's disquiet was as yet scarcely more than subconscious, but she tried to soothe the excited woman.

"He offered to correct a paper I was writing. . . ."

Some of the fierceness went out of Miss Morland's face. She made one of her long, slouching steps, sliding her foot between Drusilla and the door.

"Haven't you *heard* then? Haven't you heard anything?" There was an exultation of importance in Miss Morland's voice. "Mr. Patullo is in great trouble, poor fellow. He wrote to *me*, asking me, begging me to come to him. Isn't it *extraordinary*? He turns to me in such a way . . . so awfully pathetic. . . ."

Miss Morland was speaking in the inconsequent, soliloquising way peculiar to her. Drusilla had heard people comment on it as a result of long loneliness : she herself was inclined to attribute it to that past sorrow which had shattered Miss Morland's resolves and slackened all her powers. Something with a man in it? . . .

The light, coming brilliantly from above, fell on Grace Morland's pale face, foolish, ignoble, touching : there were heavy lines in her skin and the scanty black and grey hair was thrust back under a girlish conical hat of maize-coloured straw. She wore an old coat of violet pastel cloth and a thin grey frock, very short-skirted. Her brown boots were wrinkled and dirty and her gloves, rolled into a ball, deformed one of her pockets. Her clothes, at the time of their

purchasing, had probably cost three times as much as Drusilla's : but in her fatigue and dishevelment, she looked like some uncouth monster affronting a dainty princess in browns and yellows.

"I'd better go away . . . I'm sorry he's in trouble . . . I can see him again," Drusilla said in confusion. She had thought that she heard footsteps in her mother's flat. Of late Mrs. Trathbye had exaggerated a habit of listening and pretending till long afterwards that she had not heard. . . . It would not be possible to ask Grace to come in to see her mother and aunt. Unexpected visitors caused dismay in the Trathbyes' flat ; and Grace Morland was disliked by the whole family, partly because of her oddities and affectations, partly because the acquaintanceship with her marked the beginning of a certain self-assertion in Drusilla. . . . They were curt in speech to Miss Morland, and Aunt Caroline mentioned coals and lights and the trouble of extra dishes.

"We-ell, when shall I see you again ? " Miss Morland said, suddenly friendly, as Drusilla turned away. "You're going into the park ? "

"I'll wait for you in the Chrysanthemum Walk," Drusilla said, and ran downstairs with her poor sheets shut into the volume of H. G. Wells.

In the park she meditated, walking slowly between the splendours of the blooms. Violet shadows lay on the wet, sunny, blue-gleaming path : golden leaves, transfused with sunlight, hung on the boughs already half stripped. In Drusilla's brown costume, her wide brown hat trimmed with yellow, and the shadowed reds of her hair, the hues of the flowers were transposed to a lower key. Only the crimson of her lips, the pinks and whites of her face, had no counterparts in these

autumn blossoms, but were of summer, of the time of roses.

Drusilla thought . . . lately she had begun to feel doubtful if Grace had had a man in her past life—a man whose voice broke at parting, whose eyes overflowed, whose hand shook. . . . It was rather difficult to imagine Grace attracting a man : it was more than difficult, it was impossible, to believe the tales that she told of men who had loved her. “It was *extraordinary* the devotion that man poured out,” Grace would say. “For five years, imagine ! I had nothing to give in return, of course, and I told him so.” She had many reports of how engaged men, even married men, had confided in her that they were unhappy, had not found true helpmates. “Isn’t it *extraordinary*, Drusilla ? There seems to be something in me that brings men to confide in me—men who might almost be my father.” Grace’s habit of relating these stories in public, often on cars where her loud voice must attract attention, had not endeared her to Drusilla. The stories were full of contradictions : they could not be credited even by Drusilla with her gentle faith and pride in the honour of her sex. Nor could she continue to believe in the “happy life,” the “hosts of friends” and the “first-class education” to which Miss Morland noisily laid claim. Grace’s accomplishments fell to pieces as fast as the hands of a closer acquaintanceship were ~~to~~ stretched to grasp them. The hosts of friends dwindled to a few middle-aged and elderly married couples and single women who wore “sports” coats indoors. Patullo seemed to be Miss Morland’s only male friend : she was hardly tolerated by the young men at the Eire. Drusilla had the terrifying insight that goes with

singleness of heart : she realised that, whereas in the case of her mother and Aunt Caroline, circumstances had imposed a layer of coarseness, in speech and habit, on creatures formerly decent, Miss Morland had sought to cover with an imitation of refinement a coarseness that was hers by birth. Drusilla's soft eyes had watched Miss Morland, eating untidily in her lodgings, hacking at a lump of butter half swathed in paper. . . . She was run down in mind and body : her manners were unpleasant ; she never talked about anything but her own affairs. She was already boring to Drusilla, who knew so little of life. How could she ever have held the interest of a man, who, according to the women's papers, was a creature so easily bored ?

She may have been different—once. Vaguely, Drusilla was beginning to imagine a life utterly unlike her own ; a life longer but resultant in a weariness not due to its length. A life all broken into pinchbeck fragments, full of concealments, pretences, piteous failing attempts ; ending now in that jolting, jerking vivacity, that dismal feigned fitness, that sick aimlessness and languid doubt. . . .

“ Poor soul ! ” Drusilla thought tenderly. It would be so easy to pity Grace, to love her—if only she weren't so spiteful and would stop telling lies. She made claims on society that she could not substantiate. Why couldn't she be content to claim nothing and beg all ? As a beggar, she would be dear and touching and a constant sop to one's egotism. . . .

“ I used to *depend* so much on Grace,” Drusilla thought, smiling, wondering. The thought came to her that now her self-respect had awakened : she had been dreaming, uneasily, often unhappily : she had started up at the sound of bugles. . . .

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her ! No terrors could come to her in such a world, no sordid monsters of sorrow and hate. Michael's sword would fell them all. . . . Besides there were so many beautiful women in that world that no one would hate her for being beautiful.

At the whimsical thought she smiled, the grave red mouth curving into glee. Michael's smile came to meet hers and gambolled with it into a laughter which neither of them sought to explain. The corner of the park was as a garden of enchantment in which phantasies were known as intense realities and the material things of physical life showed only as pallid distant ghosts and grotesques.

There was a sound of footsteps—big, slouching, slack, like the steps of a man who was tired or drunk. Drusilla saw Miss Morland turning the corner from the Chrysanthemum Walk.

Michael had just been speaking of beautiful words and conjunctions of words—of Homer's "hollow black ships," of Rossetti's "dust and flame," of Robert Buchanan's "divine dark day of emerald calm," of Coleridge's "restless gossamers," of Spenser's "fair lawnds" and Keats's "tawny oats." It came to Drusilla, with a bitter cold sense of being only a stranger in his country, that the word that flashed through her brain at the sight of Grace Morland was the miserable commercial one "shop-tossed." Yet it was powerfully descriptive, Drusilla thought: Grace's life, her soul, as well as her person, gave one an impression of having been "shop-tossed." She had lain about in a litter of dust and oddments, and had become worn without ever having been of use.

As the dusty, dishevelled figure came near it seemed like a fustian monster threading the paths of the

enchanted garden where the prince and princess sat in happiness. They both rose at its approach. To Drusilla it came as a reminder of the passing of time in the old world of pretences that she had left. To Michael the figure brought a great start of shame and remorse. He had forgotten Patullo. He was altogether unworthy of Drusilla—his selfish, shallow irresponsibility made him a danger to this unfolding rose with its delicate heart of white and gold. How could he hope to handle it with enough of reverence and of tenderness?

"We—ell? Is this the Chrysanthemum Walk, kiddie?" Miss Morland asked gaily.

"No," Drusilla replied. "I waited a long time—then I sat down here. Mr. Quentin had been up at our house with a book."

"I see—with a book," Miss Morland said quizzically. She glanced curiously from one to the other. Drusilla was watching her in wonder: the fatigue and look of suffering that she had noted when they were at Patullo's door had certainly deepened in Miss Morland's face. She looked tragic now, almost grand, in her pallor, with her deep lines and gazing eyes: so that Drusilla wondered how she could ever have said "Grace" to a woman so old and of such sore experiences. Yet Miss Morland's curiosity was plainly quite genuine: it was one of her weaknesses most irritating to Drusilla—a flunkey appetite for material facts and gossip about all persons, within or without the circle of her acquaintance.

"Isn't it *awful* about Mr. Patullo, Mick?" Miss Morland said eagerly to Michael, who had been about to excuse himself. "Isn't it *extraordinary* how he adored that child? His wife—oh——"

She rambled on, speaking with an utter openness, deviating every now and then into other subjects, telling little spiteful stories of Patullo's wife, of the shifts and miseries of his life with her. Patullo had told her that Michael knew everything: but it is doubtful if she would have restrained herself in his hearing in any case: she neither asked, nor seemed to care, whether Drusilla was informed or not, but talked incoherently, incessantly, irrelevantly, as if the spring of her will were broken.

"We-ell, here's my car," she said at the gate of the park. "Don't be late for tea, or the old lady'll be mad. No, no, dear, I've no idea of staying——" as Drusilla made a false faltering offer.

As the car hummed away Drusilla and Michael looked at each other; puzzled, compassionate, ashamed that they were so happy, that they cared so little about poor old Patullo and Miss Morland that they could hardly bring themselves to think or speak of them. Michael, especially, found this thing strange for he believed that Love opened wide the doors of the human heart for the admission of God and all one's fellow human beings. He could only conclude sadly that his love was as yet a feeble thing—all unworthy of this fair princess.

Oh, it would grow! He would water it with prayerful tears: he would make all his life a cry for purification. He would wait and prove himself. All his fellows would be dear to him for her sake: he would feed the hungry and clothe the naked and watch by the dead for her sake. He would comfort the comfortless—not only Irishmen but all men in all countries. As he had dreamed of Ireland, glorified, as the centre of a world of faith, so he now saw his love-lit

life like a bright evangelising island in the midst of a dark world of calumny and envy and grief.

It did not occur to him to fear that she might not understand his tribute of waiting. She was young : love was surely only stirring in her heart. For her, too, there must be the misty, vaguely glorious days of expectancy. That was the meaning of the note in her voice, the smile that had suddenly shone from her eyes. She had faith—she would mistake no footstep for Love's. Let her have her enchanted time of waiting and wondering in the garden, mazy, mysterious in the morning light, full of hinted glories. God Himself, reverent, stood by and left to the rose its own time of unfolding.

"Good-bye," Drusilla said blissfully at Patullo's door.

"Good-bye," Michael said blissfully.

Michael went into Patullo's and found the poor man drinking tea and brandy. Drusilla entered the Trathbyes' flat : the little hall showed a darkness of shut doors, and she hurried to the kitchen.

"Late, of course," Aunt Caroline said.

"It's a queer thing how you can never be in to a meal in time," Mrs. Trathbye said in her hyperbolic manner of speaking.

"Grace Morland came—we were in the park—in the Chrysanthemum Walk," Drusilla said. She hated the deceptiveness of this—tried to explain—found that she could not. The Trathbyes had not the habit of listening. Mrs. Trathbye and Aunt Caroline generally walked away or began to talk about something else ; and afterwards they would complain that they were told nothing, that Drusilla was growing amazingly secretive.

"I met Michael Quentin too," Drusilla said.

"By appointment?" Mrs. Trathbye asked.

Essie laughed, trying to make a joke of it, ashamed of her mother's bitter agitated tone.

"He was here, of course," she said. "Aunt Carlie told him you were in the park and he went on. . . . I suppose he's well off, Dillie?"

"I don't know," Drusilla said, laughing. She took off her hat and coat and sat down. As she laid down the volume of Spenser she remembered with a sort of mental gasp that she had left the volume of H. G. Wells in the park. Her written article seemed to her now a foolish, futile thing, and it was easy to acquiesce in its loss, though she flushed at the idea of it being found and read.

"Did you know that Miss Morland had been in Mr. Patullo's house all the afternoon?" Mrs. Trathbye asked, looking darkly at her daughter.

"Mr. Patullo's in trouble—he asked her to come—they're very old friends—he used to coach her," Drusilla jerked out, with a shameful sense of her mother's deterioration. "A little while ago she would never have said such a thing!" Drusilla said to herself; and saw the thought reflected in Essie's face.

"Ah, a likely story!" Mrs. Trathbye said. "It's a long time since she was coached in anything." She began to laugh in her roguish irresistible manner, and the girls laughed too.

"He's never given me my two shillings back," Mrs. Trathbye said with intense amusement.

"Agh, he's a drunken old wretch," Aunt Caroline said. "He is. He's always drunk."

"It's rather reckless to be bringing charges like

that against people," Essie complained to Mrs. Trathbye. "She'd say it anywhere. She says things without a bit of sense."

"I've *seen* him drunk—I have so," Aunt Caroline protested; but the rebuke was received with some deference as it came from the moderate and business-like Essie. Mrs. Trathbye graduated her descent into silence by saying: "Ah, children, what can you know about men—or women?"

"Will you pass the bread, Aunt Carlie?" Drusilla asked coldly.

Aunt Caroline, rather subdued, passed it.

"I forgot to tell you Mr. Cowie called too this afternoon," she said.

Oh . . ." Drusilla's face was gleeful.

"With a book," Aunt Caroline explained.

II

At the Eire Club there were remarks passed on the intimacy between Mr. Quentin and Mr. Patullo. It was obvious to the lean woman in the sables that old Patullo had succeeded in getting on to the soft side of Michael Quentin. (The lean woman added something to her reputation as a wit by expressing a fear that all the sides that Michael had were soft ones.) Patullo was being "spoken about" in the club: there were rumours that he had borrowed money from various members; that he had, on several occasions, come to the meetings when it would have been more prudent to have remained at home. The story of the child had not penetrated to the Eire Club: it was not known even at the Mission: for Mrs. Quinn was a woman of absolute loyalty and delicacy, and the

secret had remained a secret, perhaps because there had been no strenuous efforts to keep it so. Yet the lean woman and her stout companion—whose personalities were magnetic to gossip—had “heard somewhere” that Patullo was married and living apart from his wife. It was only necessary to look at Patullo to see who was in the wrong : these two women had an antagonism to men which they mistook for sex loyalty. Patullo, from being simply jeerable, began to be monstrous in their sight : and the favouritism shown to him by Michael was a further proof of the young man’s eccentricity and his purse-proud indifference to the feelings of the respectable members of the club. He took Patullo about in his motor !

The lean woman, considering Miss Morland, hoped that Mrs. Patullo—poor thing !—had not even worse to bear. Even a society which is an organic whole contains the germs of dissolution ; and the Eire Club had never been an organism. Its cleavage into parties became a distinct and acknowledged thing. Alexander Cowie, without effort, almost unconsciously, had rallied round him the young men and nearly all the middle-aged women. Besides Drusilla, there were only two girls in the club—a pair of Irish sisters of humble birth, shop-girls, pretty, prim, and soft-eyed, who wrote religious verses and were too unpretentious to refuse to admire Drusilla. They called her “awfully sweet” and “lovely” ; regretting that she “did not make the most of herself” but wore her hair in such a dreadful touse. Because she was quiet and choice in her speech, they believed that she was well-educated and deferred to her on all matters which had no connection with dress. They saw that she belonged to Michael Quentin’s party

and they stood by Michael and Racie and old Patullo. But they found it rather difficult to treat Miss Morland as a comrade: her violent partisanship was felt to be a disgrace.

"I wouldn't worry about that woman parading an enthusiasm for you," Racie said to Michael one night in October, as they left the club. "I mean her enthusiasm for you as Chairman. Of course it is making you more unpopular every meeting; but you're bound to be unpopular anyway."

"Thanks," Michael said with an annoyed laugh.

"It's not an insult exactly," Racie said, with his sideways glance. "She's a silly woman. She has talked about the extraordinary Platonic friendship between her and old Patullo till she's driven people into thinking it can't be Platonic. If you repeat a thing often enough you're sure to make some one suspect it's not true."

"I never heard such stuff," Michael panted out. "Patullo's an *old* man."

"Patullo drinks," Racie said. "I'd believe him if he said he was not fifty yet."

"Well—fifty!" Michael uttered. "What's the good of staying alive as long as that if it doesn't insure you against scandal?"

"Miss Morland's single gift is the making of scandal," Racie said. "Haven't you noticed she's that sort of woman? I'm saying nothing against her——"

"Oh no; of course not," Michael jeered. . . . "It's shameful to be applying words like that to the poor lady."

"Words?" Racie came near saying: "Wurruds?"

"Well, you called her a woman," Michael said.

"You know 'woman' is a term of reproach. People are called women only in low newspaper paragraphs."

"'Poor lady' is just as bad," Racie retorted. "It has a clinical suggestion. . . . All I mean is that Miss Morland has a personality. . . . If she were a pretty—lady—she would break up families; she might do it if she were brilliant without being pretty. As she's neither, she only half does everything: she has all the disadvantages of her sex without any of its privileges. She's the kind of woman men dislike and other women are ready to love. But she sacrifices women's friendship to clutch at a thing that isn't for her—men's admiration, that's to say. . . . She's a silly . . . lady."

Michael, irritably aware of some truth in Racie's words, stopped to watch a street artist, who by the glow of a lamp was plastering the kerb with colours. The man had made a copy of an Asti head, red-haired and white-throated; and crude as the thing was its hint of florescent beauty recalled Drusilla. . . . As Michael dropped money into the flaccid, suppliant cap, he thought of the dragging footsteps of the pavement woman who had passed under his windows that night in summer; of the heavy and the light footsteps that had passed away side by side. A woman bargaining for the things she needed most—food and shelter and clothes; the horrible profane craving to go on living after she had bartered her soul! . . . It was a solemn thought that Drusilla also was a woman: it was not possible to understand how, with needs so different, two creatures came to be called of the same species.

"The trouble with you," Racie's voice came, "is that you aren't a bit interested in your kind. Not

really. You are bored by me talking about Miss Morland."

"Lord knows I am!" Michael interjected.

"Who's obvious now?" Racie said. "The woman doesn't interest you *qua* woman." Michael groaned. "Yes, *qua*'s Mercurial," Racie said. "I had to get your attention. Miss Morland *has* personality. She's all made up of inferior stuff but she bulks largely."

"How dare you say she's all of inferior stuff?" Michael said. "Uh——"

He and Racie lifted their hats. In the lighted and shadowed street Miss Morland and Patullo, walking quickly, passed them.

"How about Miss Trathbye?" Racie asked, elaborately off-hand.

"Oh, Cowie's seeing her home," Michael said. "I suppose he'd asked her and she couldn't get out of it."

Racie looked hard at his friend. Michael spoke confidently. His face was bafflingly happy and serene. . . . It was too obvious to Racie that Cowie would have no chance with the Trathbyes. A widow knew better than to prefer a struggling young doctor of low birth to Michael Quentin with his five thousand a year. Oh, she would swallow the public-houses!

"I wish I could do something for Patullo," Michael said fervently. "He really cares for poetry and art and everything worth bothering about. I'm convinced that he could easily be got to keep straight if only one could hit on a plan. . . ."

"Oh, by Jupiter, if it's a *plan* that's wanted! . . ."

Racie said. He added, with a sudden emotion waving across his face: "How many plans *have* you made for people, Mick?"

Alexander Cowie often—indeed generally—did see Drusilla home from the meetings of the Eire Club. His habit was to overtake her quietly as she left the hall and either to murmur his request or speechlessly to act as if it were granted. The club rooms were in the neighbourhood of Buchanan Street, in Burke Place, exclusive and poorly lighted; and, though Cowie's boots creaked loudly amid the silent solid buildings, not even the lean woman had noticed that he habitually went home with Miss Trathbye. It was partly owing to Cowie's promptitude and discretion; but more to a certain weightiness in his character. In Cowie's conception of his relationship with his fellows he had not left room for the ideas that he could be absurd or censurable. He would have said himself that he had "no use for" people whose standards were different from his own; and his absolute confidence in his conformity to those standards must be reflected as respect in the hearts of his companions.

He knew that Drusilla chaffed him: but a young woman's chaff of a young man did not mean that he struck her as ridiculous. Cowie, smiling, knew that it meant something different. . . .

Rising to speak at the Eire Club, Cowie always looked, with unswerving bright eyes, at the Chairman. He found Michael Quentin amusing; and the fact that Michael had money for which he did not work was offensive to all the traditions of Cowie's set. He, and the excellent young men who were his companions, were contemptuous of rich men who had made no efforts; they had a genuine scorn for anything that was "unbusinesslike" or "unwholesome"—anything that suggested "side." "La-di-da!" they said of Michael's motor, his shirt-front, and his

house at Fauldstane. Why could not Michael stay in his proper place and leave them alone? They had the snobbery of men of economical and hard-working habits for an unclassed being who had no right to a share in the scurrying City life. Cowie, at least, had no stronger feeling than this half-conscious one against Michael Quentin: he was amused by the poor fellow's nervousness and felt a kind of admiration for Michael's flow of words the meaning of which it was not worth while to pursue. Cowie took scarcely more heed of him than he did of a cloud in the sky, or of the Humanitarian Movement in Britain, or of Bahaism in Persia: Michael Quentin was like these, an uncomprehended thing, moving in another sphere, a fantastic and unsubstantial thing which had its own out-blazings of light and its own mysterious tempests. . . .

As for thinking of Michael as a rival—how could Alexander Cowie do that? Cowie was—almost—sure that Drusilla cared for him: he regarded her as a member of his own class, and Michael as a despicable swell who would marry a “Society woman.” Cowie knew that Society women were not nice people: a fellow who had been intimate with them could never settle down with a quiet girl like Drusilla. Society women always had money, and moneyed men always married money.

It is a fact that Michael Quentin had even less thought of Cowie as a rival. To Michael it seemed that every one who met Drusilla must be immediately aware of her difference from all the other members of the Eire Club, and indeed from all other people on earth. Michael was not absolutely deluded in this faith: for Drusilla, by reason of her retired life, her exquisite sensuousness, and her beauty, showed

uniquely among her associates. Some of them were repelled by this rareness in her, a few—like the two pretty shop-girls—were charmed by it: most were rendered dimly uneasy and resentful. Alexander Cowie was probably the only person in the Eire Club who felt at home with Drusilla. For a variety of reasons, Cowie was incapable of knowing that she was essentially different from other girls of his acquaintance.

Where Drusilla was concerned, Michael left Cowie out of account; as completely as the inhabitant of a cloudland castle might ignore the cashier of the bank in a street below. The burning, stinging pains that Cowie could make Michael feel were not the stirrings of an unacknowledged jealousy: they were simply the throes of an unsuccessful, sensitive man, knowing himself be-mocked and fancying far more cruelty than lived in the scoffer. Michael had felt from their first night of meeting that Cowie noticed his flushings and palings, his agitations, his stammer: he felt that Cowie knew that he had no place of his own in the social structure. He was envious of Cowie's goings to and fro, his popularity and cheerfulness, his normality, his absolute contentment with himself and his own people, his own health and good looks, his moderate success in business, his amusements, his accent. It was idle to try to imagine Cowie transported into a different society and, flushed and uneasy, acknowledging that he was not normal; for he made a solid whole with his surroundings. He was so truly a part of them that it was not possible to believe that they had been more creative of him than he of them. The absence of social ambition in him, his freedom from shames for himself or his friends, gave him

immunity from suffering. Once or twice Michael had aimed a quivering sarcasm at him : but Cowie had not understood.

It was this very contentment of Cowie's that had made it impossible for Michael to see that he loved Drusilla. A creature, however uncouth, who was shaken by noble angers and divine doubts, might have looked up to this princess and—despairingly—rejoicingly—loved her. A Caliban—not a counter-jumper ! Cowie with his tan boots and trim trousers, his rosy cheeks and cushiony little dark moustache and pretty eyes, his jests and quotations from popular weeklies—what had he to do with Love's frenzies and raptures, Love's dishevelments and exhaustions ? . . . It was utterly clear that Cowie would not under any circumstances have understood Drusilla. If the idea of him loving her had been presented to Michael he would have found it not laughable only because it was too profane for mirth. When he sat at the green table at the Eire Club and felt his knees tremble when Cowie rose, it was not because he saw in him Drusilla's lover : the struggle between them was as yet just the same as on the night of their first meeting—the eternal struggle between the solemnity of the dreamer and the practical man's frivolity. It was with no fear, with no anger, and with hardly any disappointment that Michael watched Drusilla go away with Cowie that night in October.

In the grey-blackness of Burke Place, splashed with the golden green lights of incandescent lamps, Drusilla walked along beside Cowie ; thinking of him a little because she was in his presence. She had noticed that girls usually did not like him and, idly, sought the reason : but her interest in him was too superficial

and he faded out of her thoughts. Cowie was clearly very popular with his fellow-men ; and middle-aged and elderly women were almost demonstrative in their affection for him. He had told Drusilla that he was twenty-seven and had never " gone with " any girl ; and, after she had got over her amusement at the vulgar phrase, she had found, with a feeling of surprise, that the fact was just as she would have guessed. In her laziness and her coldness to Cowie, she explained it by thinking that, in spite of his self-rejoicing, he was probably shy of young women. She understood why he had told her and smiled every time that she recalled it. She felt sure of her power over him : she had no suspicion that his unpopularity among girls was a sign of his indomitable character : yet, dimly, she was every now and then aware of the masculine force latent in him. It was like a gigantic creature too thick-hided to be tickled into annoyance or pleasure by the light fingers of her mockery.

This night, as they left the Eire, Drusilla was gay. The paper had been an exquisite one, about dreams and omens, delivered by a Dublin friend of Racie's. What was called a discussion had followed, and, mysteriously, the members of the Eire Club had leapt into a dispute about cremation. It had filled Drusilla with happiness to find Michael's eyes, brimming with laughter, seeking hers : she had been aware of a different quality in his merriment : he was no longer bitter in his disappointment, he no longer took the Eire Club seriously. Something else filled his heart.

" I didn't think much of yon, did you, Miss Trath-bye ? " Cowie was saying as they walked. " Dreams are made up of cheese and underdone potatoes——"

" And lobster," Drusilla scoffed.

Cowie laughed, thinking she offered it as her contribution of wit. "You don't dream, do you?" he asked, with a little anxiety.

"Often," Drusilla said. "I never dreamed of cheese nor lobster, but I sometimes *do* dream of things to eat."

"That's the result of going to bed on an empty stomach," Cowie said gravely. "Let me advise you not to do that. I believe in a light supper, but that's a very different thing from one that isn't nourishing."

Drusilla had flushed, thinking of the insufficient suppers at home, especially when "poor John" had made one of his locust-like descents upon them.

"What do you eat at night, may I ask?" Cowie said.

"Good gracious! I don't want you to be sending me a bill for consultations," Drusilla said. "I eat bread . . . biscuits . . . apples and things . . ."

"Milk?" Cowie asked.

"Sometimes," Drusilla said. The Trathbys used only threepenny-worth of milk a day.

"Brown bread? You look well. . . . You have always good health, Miss Trathbye?"

"Yes," Drusilla said, bubbling with laughter. They reached the car station and, on the journey, she must listen to a long grave lecture from Cowie about diet, maintaining the temperature of the body, even about clothing. Now and then a little "ki-iigh!" of laughter escaped Drusilla, but Cowie, intent, neither paused nor took offence. She found, afterwards, that he had asked her a great many personal questions and that she had answered them all.

"Here we are," Cowie said. They were a little late at rising and, as they were descending the stair, the

car started again. Drusilla swayed forwards and Cowie quickly clasped his arm about her and lifted her on to the platform. He jumped to the road, still holding her, surprised and thrilled by the strength of his arm.

III

As they went up the Trathbyes' street, Cowie discussed the suggestion of complaining of the guard, whose number he had noticed.

"Don't be ridiculous!" Drusilla said, amused. She was all the more merry because she felt inclined to yield to the general tendency to take Cowie seriously. She found herself glancing at his sleeve and visualising the strong white arm within.

Cowie went on prosing till he had said all that he wanted to say; then he stopped, and laughed.

"Miss Trathbye, do you know you're the only woman I know who takes her fun out of me?"

"Your mother and sisters . . . ?" Drusilla suggested. He had told her about them—Bessie, the eldest, who sang a great deal at concerts, and "wee Aggie" whom Drusilla pictured as a pretty child.

"It's not in their line," Cowie said with his tolerant smile. "They're very good sort of girls, but they're not clever. I couldn't talk to them about littery things the way I do to you. They're first-rate at cake-baking and all that kind of thing. Wee Aggie took a prize for a currant cake at our church bazaar."

"How good!" Drusilla said. She remembered reading that really nice young men always talked about their mothers and sisters and was ashamed of her own tendency to feel bored. Cowie went on to

give a laughing account of wee Aggie's mixing of the cake and the number of dishes that she had "requisitioned."

"But we all have our own lines," Cowie said suddenly. He looked at her anxiously with shining eyes. "I think women have a perfect right to develop their own individualities. I shouldn't think of limiting an intellectual woman—like yourself say—to domestic work."

"But I'm not intellectual," Drusilla said, with a flash of her teeth between the smiling red lips. "I'm one of the most ignorant, uneducated people you could imagine. I'm fond of poetry and music and pictures, that's all. I couldn't make anything."

"Well—the feminine brain is not creative," Cowie said. "That is so. Say a cultured woman—or an artistic woman, if you like. 'Intellectual woman' makes you think of a rather masculine sort of person." They were opposite the Trathbyes' close and Cowie laid a pleading hand on Drusilla's arm. "Walk to the end of the terrace, will you? It's such a fine night."

It was a windy dusty night and Lochaber Gardens was built on a steep slope: but Drusilla turned, not displeased by the wistfulness in Cowie's manner. Self-consciousness made her begin to talk quickly.

"You spoke about your church bazaar? I thought you didn't go to any church?"

Cowie expanded in self-delight.

"That is so. As a rule I do not. But I've never given up being a member of our church—I've never lifted my lines. My mother has old-fashioned prejudices and I think I shouldn't cause her pain. . . . I'm practically an agnostic. I think it's the honest

attitude. I don't know if I've told you—I was much influenced by reading Darwin and Haeckel. . . .”

Cowie went on, trotting out all the old sayings of the debating society, the maxims of brotherly love, the gibes at Hell-fire.

“We don't go much to church,” Drusilla said, half listening. . . . “We're Episcopalians, you know: but *I* like to go into Catholic chapels.” There was a pause.

“It doesn't matter,” Cowie said eagerly. “Mother wouldn't mind.”

“Mind? When?” Drusilla faltered.

“When I bring you to see her,” Cowie said, with a tender quizzicalness. A smile had flashed out on his face, but he was blushing. “When am I to get bringing you—eh?”

Drusilla felt his hands close warmly, insistently, over hers. She drew hers away excitedly, and, turning, walked quickly homewards. Her maidenhood was offended by Cowie's way of counting on her consent; and this feeling for the time overruled all others, so that she was not conscious of surprise at the suddenness of his speech, nor regret for his disappointment. She understood now why girls did not like him: there was a kind of violence and disrespect in thus cutting short his time of wooing. She felt that he thought of her as a woman to marry, not as a girl to love: she felt aged, unhaloed, disrobed of mystery by his action.

“Are you angry?” Cowie gasped, bending towards her, nervously smiling.

“No,” Drusilla said without truth. She *was* angry, but could not have explained her feeling. “Only . . . that was a funny thing to say. Did your mother *ask* you to bring me to see her?”

"No," Cowie said, smiling cunningly, in enjoyment of her womanly wiles. "But I hope she will some day. . . . She has an idea I'm going with some young woman . . . and she knows I'm not the kind of fellow to *amuse* myself."

"Going with?"

"Well, I beg pardon. I suppose you don't like the expression," Cowie said. "It's rather vulgar. You're such a superior girl," he added admiringly.

Drusilla remembered the grace and self-possession shown by the girls in novels when they refused lovers. She found herself nearly inarticulate: she tried to explain and had a sense of struggling to move an enormous weight. . . . Cowie's voice came to her—with a touching note in it—saying: "It's 'No' then? It's 'No.' . . . You'd rather be left alone just now?" She felt cruel in baffling his eagerness even with her conviction that his love was a poor material thing. At the close entrance she clasped his hand in both of hers:

"I'm sorry. . . . I was a stupid wretch. . . . I'm sorry."

"Thank you," Cowie said, with a wan smile. She saw that he had no faith in the finality of her answer, and she had a weak feeling of relief that his self-confidence saved him from pain. Had she really "gone with" him? The thought was not tolerable. She could not consult her mother as the happy girl in fiction did. She felt again that sense of being made old, of being sobered out of romance, as she realised that he had taken it for granted that she understood. He had a detestable way of calling her a "woman": it seemed insistent on sex.

A boy with an apple in his hand clattered down

the stair, and Drusilla gave him a neighbourly greeting.

"Hallowe'en's coming," Cowie said. . . . "Do you dream on Hallowe'en, Miss Trathbye? Good night."

The boy laughed archly, munching the apple.

IV

On All Saints' Eve the Trathbys had a fire in the sitting-room and a sugared bun for tea. Mrs. Trathbye cut the bun and Drusilla and Essie could not help suspecting that she had felt the knife jolt on the paper-wrapped ring in a certain slice and had deliberately given it to Kathleen. The slight chill caused by this piece of injustice was, however, melted away by the unusual plenty and fun of the evening. Essie had had a "rise," and had bought the cake and some fruit; and after tea the girls knelt by the fire and burned pairs of nuts on the bars. The red glow shone in their hair and glistened in their eyes; and Aunt Caroline—who was ailing that day—lay joking on the couch near them. Mrs. Trathbye, preparing the plates for fortune-telling, went to and fro, now to her work-basket for a scrap of cloth—red for a soldier, blue for a sailor, black for a minister—now to the kitchen for salt or water.

Essie, stealthily smiling, set two filberts on the bar: she was thinking of the cashier's friend who often came for him at lunch-time, who had asked to be introduced. . . . A little giggle escaped Essie as she placed the nuts: then she uttered an "Aw!" of disappointment as the larger one rolled into the fire.

"It's not fair to try it over again," Kathleen said

in her unpleasant way : but Drusilla, who was sure of whom the great glossy nut was symbolic, declared that the accident had happened before the rite had really commenced. Essie tried again, but this time the two nuts only smoked a little before sinking into a sudden oiliness.

Drusilla would not use a nut to represent Michael Quentin : it would have seemed sacrilegious to have placed herself and Michael on the bar beside Essie and the cashier's friend. It was so clear to her that Michael and the cashier's friend could have nothing in common. So she chose the names of men to whom she was indifferent, avoiding, however, the name of Alick Cowie. Kathleen, too, was making a mere sport of the thing, and presently said that she would try herself with Mr. Patullo.

"If he catches fire he's sure to blaze," Mrs. Trathbye said gaily. Patullo's drunkenness was now an open scandal to his neighbours : for the poor man had allowed himself to be seen twice in an unsteady state on the stairs and was therefore reported to be unable to mount them any night without assistance. On the day following the second of these drunken fits, Patullo had been ill, and Mrs. Trathbye and Aunt Caroline had gone again and again to his door with neighbourly offers of tea and coffee and hot water. Miss Morland had come up in the afternoon ; and Drusilla thought with a wondering disgust of how the three women had contended in their ministries to Patullo.

"You'd better try him with Miss Morland !" Aunt Caroline said in her reckless way that had no faith and practically no malice behind it, but was simply an empty mind's echoing of the ideas of others. Aunt Caroline, who was something of a courtier to her

sister-in-law, was pleased to win laughter from Mrs. Trathbye.

Kathleen set the two nuts on the bar ; but in her mirth her hand shook and they rolled alarmingly.

"That's not the way to put them, child !" Mrs. Trathbye said, kneeling on the rug. "There—I'll give you a wrinkle, as Miss Morland says" It was one of Grace Morland's phrases, and Mrs. Trathbye was intensely amused by her own rather poor imitation of Grace's voice.

"Well, she can spare one !" Kathleen said, and, giggling, called every one's attention to the jest.

"Ah, you're very dry, Drusilla !" Mrs. Trathbye said to her unsmiling daughter. "Sitting there with a solemn face and them all laughing round you."

Going to bed, Drusilla thought of this and wondered if, a few months ago, she would have been amused at the joke : she thought not, but, censuring herself, could remember having laughed at sayings as vulgar and unkindly stupid. She rejoiced now in feeling that she had been left outside of the laughter. She was glad of all the points of difference between her and her relations, between her and all the people that she knew. The reproaches of "odd," "cold," "impossible to understand," "so different from the rest," had no longer power to burn her heart. If she had been the same as the others, she could not have cared for Michael Quentin. Had God made her and kept her different for Michael ? She was glad that no one had loved the beauty that had seemed so wasted—that no one had fondled her hair, sweet-smelling, with its wonderful crispness of lights and darks. Girls in novels had mothers who stroked the shining locks and wound them about their fingers and dressed them for

the world's admiration. . . . But she was glad that God had kept hers untouched like a precious thing in a casket, awaiting the coming of the rightful inheritor so that she might let it down and bathe Michael's face in its bright virgin astonishment and wipe his eyes with it and press it to his lips. . . .

She got into bed, and putting her stocking under her pillow lay waiting to fall asleep and dream of Michael. Essie was still undressing when Mrs. Trathbye came into the room, wandering here and there in a furtive, tentative fashion; taking a pin from the cushion on the dressing-table, asking if the windows were not too wide open.

"Aren't you going to bed, mother?" Essie asked, busy with her stocking. . . . "Dillie has hers in: she can't speak to say good night."

Essie began to murmur the incantation proper to the Hallowe'en custom of "dreaming on" one's stocking; and suddenly Mrs. Trathbye came close to the bed: she spoke like one whose uneasiness pricks her into speech of which she is ashamed.

"Dillie . . . I hope now you aren't foolish enough to be thinking Michael Quentin has any matrimonial intentions. . . . Sure you aren't? . . . It would be too ridiculous to take such an idea into your head. . . . Why, he paid less attention to you than to any one of them!"

The Holy Eve superstition gave Drusilla an excuse for keeping silence: she turned her head so that the glowing hair fell over her ear and cheek. Mrs. Trathbye's voice, pleading insanely to be reassured, stabbed her with contempt. "Don't tell me that Michael Quentin cares for you," her mother seemed to be begging. "Don't tell me that, for I couldn't bear

to hear it." The brilliance of the match, the advantages that would accrue from it to the whole family, were lost sight of in the dread of the intolerable pain of seeing Drusilla beloved, dazzling, triumphant. . . . Mrs. Trathbye had been driven into speech by her daughter's reserve : the mother had been waiting for Michael's name so that she might soothe her jealousy with the discovery that her fears were unfounded : her crouching attitude as she bent over the bed, her eyes that pretended to smile, seemed to ask for mercy.

Drusilla suddenly sat up, linking her arms about her mother's neck : but Mrs. Trathbye tore herself from the clasp and hurried from the room.

Essie stood for a minute in puzzlement ; then, with a complete egotism, she turned out the gas, put her stocking under her pillow, and got into bed.

Michael Quentin was at The Corner House on All Saints' Eve ; and he had brought down old Patullo to spend a few days with him. Michael hoped that the pure air, the quietude, and, especially, the colour-scheme of the house, would have beneficial effects on Patullo. . . .

There was no doubt that the poor man was drinking more than ever—or at least with less concealment. Racie Moore had spoken to Michael of the folly of giving Patullo money for drink. It was base of Racie to say that it was not safe even to give Patullo money for flowers for his little boy's grave : the suspicion seemed to Michael worthy of a fiend, and he said so.

" Well, can't you give the money to Miss Morland ?" Racie said. " She'll take the flowers out—she often

goes. It will be safer so. . . . She's the kind of person to enjoy visiting graves."

Michael, yearning for the soul of Patullo, made an effort to follow this advice. He spoke openly to Patullo, explaining that he did not despise him, that he believed that to resist the alcohol crave was an heroic destiny. And, under the soothing, toning influence of Michael's respect (or perhaps of the colour-scheme of The Corner House) Patullo developed a temporary energy of resistance. He was one of the most sympathetic admirers that The Corner House had ever had : the rooms certainly seemed bare to him : but he acquiesced in Michael's arguments of the expression of a single mood, of pure lines and hues, of the undisturbed eye and heart. Against the unsullied walls Patullo's face showed horribly discoloured and demoralised : but before the end of the third day Michael observed a distinct change in him. His nose was not so red ; the whites of his eyes cleared : something of the bowed weariness went from his walk. He declared that Michael's vegetarian diet was delightful : it had made him a little headachy at first, he believed, but that feeling had soon passed. He contented himself, with apparently not much difficulty, with the light wines that Michael drank, but laughingly confessed that he could not cultivate a taste for fruit. Michael was disappointed by this, but—having read much of the fruit cure for alcoholism—continued to tempt Patullo, even in his bedroom, with still-life groups of purple grapes, pears, and peaches. They had long, enjoyable talks on the food question, and Patullo, with his air of intelligent courtesy, showed a surprised interest in Michael's statement that right dieting was the basis of right living. . . . Michael

ventured to read aloud Tolstoi's "First Step"—and, as he had expected, was overmastered by his emotions.

"Your loss of self-control does you credit, Mr. Quentin," Patullo said, wiping his spectacles and coughing.

It pleased Michael to consider Patullo as a means by which he could make himself a little more worthy of Drusilla; his first adventure in the long series of purifying rescues of the wronged helpless, and sanctifying battles with stupidity and sin. For this reason alone Patullo would have become dear to the young man: but, even when not considered as an instrument, Patullo had attributes which moved to compassion, thence to liking. After a few long talks with him it was possible for Michael to reconstruct him as a young man, devout yet ardently classic, his memory filled with long passages of Greek and Latin, his heart with dreams of fair columns, black against saffron sunsets, and masses of olive, grey in opalescent mornings. "I always had an ambition to go to Italy and to Greece," Patullo said, with his squeamish smile. "Nothing could be more educative than the old pagan countries seen with Christian eyes."

"Oh, I wish I'd been educated!" Michael groaned. "I wish I'd been taught some one fine thing thoroughly, so that I might carry it about with me all my life! . . ."

Patullo looked at him emotionally; his self-respect going up with a leap at the realisation that he was being envied by Michael Quentin.

"Mr. Quentin you—hegh, hegh, hegh!—you do carry something fine about with you, I think, if you'll allow me to say so. . . . As for the Greek and Latin,

why shouldn't you read with me? I've known men who've begun at nearly twice your age."

Michael looked up, swaying about and blushing.

"As a friend," Patullo added firmly.

"Thank you," Michael said.

They read together; and suddenly one night there flashed into Michael's mind a scheme by which he might insure the tutor against the return of his craving. The plan was so simple, it rushed forth in such completeness, that Michael felt sure that it must have been suggested to him by some friend "on the other side"—probably by Rollo himself. To drive the demon out of Patullo's life, it was only necessary to surround him with pure hopes and interests. He would ask Patullo to come with him to Italy and Greece, to spend a few months in study and in wandering in the fair lands of his dreams. Michael's ignorance, his dependence on Patullo, would develop just the right sense of importance in this man whom the world had baffled and despised.

It would not be an easy thing to do. Michael's heart quailed at the idea of months to be passed without seeing or hearing from Drusilla: but the very difficulty of the deed made it seem the more knightly, the more saintly, the more acceptable to his princess and to God. . . . It was a slight thing: it was made significant only by the spirit in which it was done: the offering to his love of this poor wronged bemired soul, made clean and strong, was only a confession of his sense of the vileness of his own soul. . . . It was only the wiping of his feet before he dared enter the temple.

Since his meeting with Drusilla, Michael had spent a great deal of his time in the white studio. He

prayed there, sometimes after many hours of fasting, and he believed that the moral strength thus acquired was giving him power to hold the soul of Thomas Patullo. The idea of taking Patullo away came—he could not doubt—as a response to those long, rapturous prayers when his spirit seemed to come near to peeping over the physical barrier. “Do this thing,” the powers on the other side seemed to say. “You want to do something—do this first.” There was exultation in the thought of the pain that it would cause him to go away, silent, while their love was in its misty dawning phase of chance meetings and sudden partings. . . . Drusilla would understand.

“He’s clean daft,” Mattie the cook said on All Saints’ Eve as Michael went up the stair to the white studio. Mattie spoke to the new parlour-maid and the new housemaid; for Muriel and Helen had left, asserting that they were “bored stiff” by The Corner House and the “goings-on” of its owner. Tosh, the serious chauffeur, had done nothing to lighten their lot.

“He’s up a pole,” Mattie said, referring to Michael. “Poor lad, I declare I sometimes feel that sorry for him—it vexes me to think of him. Jim”—the second-gardener—“Jim says to me, ‘My word, Mattie,’ he says, ‘if I’d Mr. Quentin’s money, I’d have a rare time with it.’ So’d I, wouldn’t you? I declare—maybe it isn’t a right thing to say when it’s not us has the disposing of things, but I sometimes can’t help thinking money’s always given to the wrong sort of folks, don’t you? Always goes to folks that don’t seem to know what to do with theirselves. He chooses his companions very badly, I think, don’t you? My, you’d expect him to know nothing but ladies an’ gentlemen—but they won’t come to his house, maybe.

Just look at this last one—Old Bottlenose ! My, if you was to pour hot water on his clothes you'd get a barrel of whisky as strong as anybody 'ud want it." Mattie laughed at the applausive glee of the others, as arm-in-arm they went down the drive to the head gardener's lodge at the western gate. Turning, she looked back at The Corner House, blue-white and golden-eyed in a violet night of frost-whipped air and a deep dazzle of stars. The head gardener's cottage was aglow and loud with the merry-making of diving for apples and burning of mated nuts. "My, girls, I couldn't bite an apple and look in the glass, could you ?" Mattie said. "I'd drop down dead." She added, with an apparent irrelevance but a real linking of occult ideas : "There's a light in his stodio, of course. There's *nothing* in that room."

The others acclaimed and questioned.

"Well, I looked in once over his shoulder an' I saw nothing," Mattie said, "except a lot of old uncanny books and a jug of roses."

"That'll be for the dead young lady," the new housemaid said pitifully. . . . "I think he's awful nice. He's awful kind to poor folks. I think he's a real good Christian."

"No : he's a theasaphist," Mattie said. "At least I think so," she modified in charity.

Michael had remained in the studio till his plan was a finished structure, resolute in every detail. The struggle had been harder than his first diffused feeling of exaltation had allowed him to expect : there were fears and anguishes in the thought of so many material miles between him and Drusilla : his senses anticipated the hunger of months without the touch of her, the sight of her, the sound of her childish

expectant voice, the scent of her hair. . . . It was not till one o'clock that Michael rose from his knees, rather light-headed but ecstatic, and, turning out the stove and the lights, stood for a minute staring up at the blue-black slopes of the glass roof spattered with white stars. The scent of roses was strong in his nostrils as he left the room and went downstairs, his mind full of the image of a wan, happy knight, in early morning, stealing from a chapel, his vow taken and his vigil over.

Michael slept in the blue room, and the indigo bath-room lay between him and the violet guest-chamber in which Patullo was. Having bathed, Michael lay down on his bed, which, like all the other beds in The Corner House, was a mere stretcher. He found that he could not sleep: his brain, excited by his long fast and striving, was wrought up to a dancing activity: images trooped through it, vividly coloured, of an intense luminosity, solidly shaped: the scent of roses seemed to be constantly with him. The desire to see Drusilla became intolerable: he stretched out his arms, fancying her, rose-cheeked in the ruddy showers of her hair. . . .

He sat up, flinging aside the blue silken counterpane. A big round moon was riding now in the sky, and he could see the outlines of the room. There was a mirror inset in the wall at right angles to the bed, and Michael, remembering that it was All Saints' Eve, gazed into it, fixing all the power of his will on the thought of Drusilla. She would know where she lay sleeping far away, white-clad with rosy cheeks and round limbs and ruddy hair: she would look, reassuring, from the glass. . . .

As Michael leaned forward, fervently watching, he

saw the depths of the dark glass lighten and quiver ; and he saw a face look out.

Not Drusilla's face, round-cheeked and richly coloured, melting into the splendour of her hair. But the face of Rollo, sharp and wistful and kingly, as it had shown in its coffin. . . .

Michael got out of bed. The thing had been only a delusion, due to light-headedness brought on by hunger and want of sleep and strain. . . .

"Mr. Patullo !" Michael called, subduedly. There was no reply, and, rising, he crossed the indigo bath-room and set open the door of the violet chamber. The moonlight showed him the beautiful room, the rosy heliotrope of the walls, the long mauve curtains embroidered in greens and blues, the emerald and amethyst colourings of the tiles, the Michaelmas daisies in a tall blue-green jar, the purple grapes and faint shape of a siphon on a table by the bedside ; and on the bed, under white draperies and a quilt of purple silk, old Patullo lying asleep. His head was in shadow, its ugliness only guessable : but he breathed gutteringly, not as if the air flooding in at the window were a holy thing.

"Mr. Patullo——"

Patullo started with a snapped breath that sounded like "*Cork !*"—opened idiotic eyes.

"Excuse me, Mr. Patullo—I'm fearfully restless—I simply can't sleep. Would you mind leaving your door open and I'll leave mine open too ?"

"Why, of course. To be sure. Certainly, Mr. Quentin."

Patullo's words were formal ; but there was in his manner something kind, protective, almost familiar and fatherly.

V

Michael came up to town the next day and sent Racie a wire asking him to come to Mrs. Wylie's.

"Well, I must say you look rather . . ." Racie said as he came into the maroon-coloured, leather-furnished room.

"Rather what?" Michael asked acidly. "Sit down—have this one."

Racie sat in the basket-chair and Michael in the arm-chair opposite to him. There was an attractive fire and Racie smoked, looking into it.

"I suppose you'll be able to manage the meetings of the Eire yourself for the next few months?" Michael said. "Not the Mission, of course: I'll speak to Miss Morland about that."

"There mayn't be any to manage," Racie suggested.

"As usual: prepared for the worst," Michael said.

"There might be worse than having no meetings," Racie said. He waited for Michael to ask: "How?" then added: "For example, there might be meetings."

Michael uttered a short laugh.

"There are going to be meetings," he said. "And, when I come back in the spring, we're going to have some prominent men—big meetings in public halls and all that."

"Oh!" Racie said. "Well, of course . . . with five thousand I suppose . . ."

"We'll sell tickets," Michael said. "There's no earthly reason why it shouldn't pay. I'm getting tired of that tone of yours."

Racie's judgment of the result of the vow and the vigil was merely that Michael was in a bad temper.

Worrying about that girl, no doubt. As if there were any need to worry !

"I want to tell you," Michael said, tickling Mrs. Wylie's cat on the rug. "I'm going away for a holiday—with Patullo. He's told me several times he used to be keen to go to Rome and Athens—and Florence and Venice, too, and the rest. He's agreed to come with me."

Racie was looking straight, with brightening eyes, at his friend. Michael's resolve to leave the country "for a few months"—as he had hinted in speaking of the Eire Club—could mean only that he was indifferent to Drusilla. For it was out of the question that he had proposed to the girl and been refused. No widow would have allowed that.

Racie concealed his satisfaction. Michael Quentin in this perverse mood might be blown in any direction by careless words.

"I think it may help Patullo," Michael said flushing. "You'll laugh at that ?"

"No," Racie replied gravely. . . . "I'll see to the Eire. I'll do anything you like." He added quickly, afraid that he had shown a too great complacence : "I suppose you're feeling consumedly grateful to Patullo ?"

"Yes," Michael flashed out. "Patullo behaved like a gentleman. It takes a gentleman to accept things. . . . Never mind. There's Warde's paper on J. M. Synge for next meeting ; and Mrs. Topping's little play's to be read the evening after that. . . ." Michael moved to the table and began to take from his pockets and spread out crushed wads of papers, dotted with notes.

"I say," Racie said, on his knees beside him. . . .

"There's the treasurer's business, Mick. Patullo'll need to hand over the accounts to whoever takes it on. . . ."

There was a pause. Blood surged up into Michael's tired face so that its clearness of colour was for the minute restored. Racie was looking away.

"I don't want Patullo to be bothered about accounts just now," Michael said shufflingly. "You can just go on with the money affairs as if you were beginning afresh. I'd rather you didn't ask Patullo for the books or anything just now. You see I want his mind to get—filled with fresh ideas, you know."

"All right," Racie said.

"I'll leave some money for the club in case there's anything . . . unpaid," Michael said.

"All right. Blessed thing money—cures all ills and covers up all scandals," Racie said with a dry resentment.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Michael said angrily.

Miss Morland, consulted about the Mission, showed her usual enthusiastic loyalty. "Isn't it *extraordinary* how those boys, Mick Quentin and Racie Moore, depend on me?" she said to Drusilla. "I'm amused by it, Dillie: it's so remarkable." She went a score of times to Mrs. Wylie's with absurd little messages, of an inflated importance. She bustled to and from old Patullo's flat, Patullo having returned to town to set his affairs in order before his journey. Under Miss Morland's hunger for eminence there shone something grateful and glad.

Drusilla had not believed Miss Morland's statement that Michael was going away with Patullo. Grace was always making mistakes: everything she did and

said was characterised by that same impudent glib slackness. It was not till Drusilla met Patullo on the stairs that she really knew that Michael was going.

It was the Trathbyes' washing-day and Aunt Caroline was on the green, troubling the washerwoman. The clothes, flapping furiously on the swaying lines, were drying quickly in the wind ; and Mrs. Trathbye and Drusilla were carrying a basketful indoors when Patullo met them.

Drusilla, wind-blown, in an old blouse and skirt, would have passed Patullo with a smile : but she felt her mother jerk the handle of the basket, and they set it down. It was strange how Patullo's masculinity was held to atone for his meanness in that matter of the two shillings and his reported perpetual inebriety on the stairs.

" Well . . . have you been writing anything, Miss Trathbye ? " she heard Patullo say.

" I thought of trying it again . . . I commenced one or two things," she murmured, in fear of her mother's annoyance at Patullo turning his attention to her.

" Ah, she hasn't any taste for anything of that sort," Mrs. Trathbye said ; and began to tell how Kathleen was going in for a Joy Wheel Competition in one of the weeklies. Patullo inclined his head, saying, " Yes, yes," and forcing little " hegh-hegh's " of laughter at Mrs. Trathbye's confused account of how you cut out the wheel in three circles, and, having mounted these on cardboard, swung the outermost circle round till the right object was opposite to the right person, and the number in the innermost circle showed the day on which the thing happened.

" Very ingenious," Patullo said with his piteous

smile, which ran along the grief-worn channels in his face. "I hope Miss Kathleen will be successful. . . . Did you hear I was going away, Miss Trathbye?"

Drusilla had impatiently caught the handle of the basket: she clutched it more tightly.

"Yes. Miss Morland told me you were thinking of it."

"It's settled," Patullo said. "I am going to act as travelling companion to Mr. Quentin: he is very keen to see Rome and Greece and to rub up his acquaintanceship with art and literature. We are leaving on the seventeenth."

"It ought to be lovely," Drusilla said. Mrs. Trathbye silently lifted the other handle of the basket and they went into the house.

Drusilla was intolerably aware of her mother regarding her ruthfully; and several times during the day Mrs. Trathbye spoke to her daughter in the tender chaffing tone that one uses to a hurt child who, embraced, is in danger of breaking down.

"She'd be good to me always if I were disgraced," Drusilla thought in anger, "or if something happened to make me ugly."

But she was glad that nothing had happened. As she rose up out of her first prostration, she remembered that nearly two weeks lay between her and the seventeenth of November, and that there would be a meeting of the Eire Club next Thursday. She would see Michael then—unless, indeed, he came to the house before then. She exulted, defiant, in the thought that only Michael truly loved her beauty; and he loved it because he saw through it to the eternal soul of which it was the symbol. This was a thing that she felt rather than thought: for her thoughts were

seldom definite forms in the colour and light of her emotions.

"You aren't thinking of going to the club to-night?" Mrs. Trathbye said suddenly on Thursday afternoon. She had noticed that, every day of late, Drusilla had dressed herself very carefully, putting on her best embroidered collars and massing her hair low on her neck, with a big brown bow in it. The style made her look very young—much younger than Essie, incomparably younger than the solid Kathleen.

"Yes, I'm going," Drusilla said with her usual gentleness of speech, but with a note of resistant cheerfulness.

Mrs. Trathbye dropped her sewing, rose, and walked agitatedly to and fro. They were alone in the kitchen, Aunt Caroline having gone to the post-office. Drusilla was crocheting lace with which, threaded with ribbons, she ornamented all her underclothing. It had been her habit for years; but the sight of her thus employed was suddenly suggestive to her mother. Drusilla was not despairing of Michael Quentin: had she some secret support other than that dreadful confidence of beautiful women in their youth? . . . Mrs. Trathbye's sick mind could not bear her daughter's silence: she must speak in spite of her own shame. After all, she had a *right* to speak: she buttressed herself behind her motherly experience.

"Dillie, I don't think you'll be *wise* to go"—she spoke pityingly, but the fear that her daughter's happiness might come was audible, quivering in her voice. . . . "Will Michael Quentin be there?"

"I suppose so," Drusilla said, still with that air of cheerful surprise. She held up her lace, gazing at its

white stars and loops ; then bent to pick up Mrs. Trathbye's sewing.

"Never mind," Mrs. Trathbye said irritably. Dillie was the only one of the girls who showed these deferences. "I can bend as well as you," Mrs. Trathbye said sorely, looking at the brown bow, the melting of hair into the white neck, the beautiful rosy cheek.

Drusilla laughed. "Of course you can, mother." She began to sing : "'I can bend as well as you, sir, as you, sir, as you, sir. I can bend as well as you, sir, ransy-tansy-ting.' Miss Morland gives us that at gymnastics," she said ; for she had long ago confessed that she attended Grace's class and the Trathbye family had resigned themselves to it.

It seemed to Mrs. Trathbye that the girl's mirth must be genuine : for the fever in her own blood prevented her from detecting the feverish note. She felt a savage need to struggle against her daughter's growing self-assertiveness : a year ago Drusilla would not have ventured to sparkle and sing in her mother's presence. Mrs. Trathbye had always snubbed such conscious vivacities as "foolish" or "forward" or "not nice."

"Dillie . . . I think I ought to speak to you about this : you know I've always been very proud of my girls' behaviour. I've always prided myself on no daughter of mine ever doing anything common. . . . There's no worse mistake than for a young girl to let a man think she cares for him. Men make fun of girls who do things like that." Mrs. Trathbye's voice was throaty with swelling excitement. "I didn't think I'd ever need to be afraid of a daughter of mine laying herself open to remark. . . . You needn't be

trying to look innocent at me—you know what I mean. . . . If you let Michael Quentin see that you're disappointed at him going away, I'll never be able to feel anything but ashamed of you again."

"Why should I be disappointed?" Drusilla said.

"Ah . . . you know you're disappointed. I believe you took it into your head he'd serious intentions." Mrs. Trathbye laughed horribly. "God forgive you, you're so vain you think it about every man that comes near you. . . and it's not the men that want you at all, it's you that want them. It isn't nice—it isn't a way any nice-minded girl would talk and think. . . ."

"Talk?" Drusilla said, scornful. "When did *I* ever talk about men?"

"That's not a way to speak to your mother," Mrs. Trathbye said. "You're the only one of them that would speak to me in such a tone. . . . You don't set a very good example to your sisters in any way, conduct or anything else—and you so much the eldest." It was one of her trivialities, in anger, to exaggerate Drusilla's age; and she did this, with an irritating maternal undeniableness, in the presence of strangers.

Aunt Caroline's latch-key gurgled in the lock and Mrs. Trathbye vented her feelings in an outburst of weeping so that her sister-in-law might find her crying. Drusilla, leaving the room, knew just how Mrs. Trathbye, questioned, would say faintly: "Oh, it's Dillie——" leaning her head on one side, gasping, with mournful streaming face.

Drusilla was burning and trembling with the sense of her outraged maidenhood. . . . Her mother—her *mother*! Girls went to their mothers to whisper things

too fine for utterance. . . . She could not think of Mrs. Trathbye as other than the victim of a mysterious disease: yet she was beginning to fear her as a creature not blameable, but none the less infectious, repellent, and to be avoided. Drusilla's heart turned from the sight of this madness of envy: that it was the result of starved instincts and unused energies made it none the less shameful and detestable. She remembered wincingly her mother's previous attacks: she thought she understood now the terrible meaningless words that had frightened her almost beyond sanity when her mother had taken her away from the art shop. She understood why she had been suddenly removed from school, from the master who made a favourite of her, putting his arm about her waist and stroking her hair. She remembered an extraordinary passion of rebukes one time in the boarding-house in Lamb Street, when a grey-moustached man had lifted the little girl on to his knee and she had told that he had done it. . . . She always used to tell things—that was how she was accused of being secretive. Even now she had to remind herself to keep silence. . . . Essie could do it quite easily; she had never let her mother know that the cashier had a friend.

In novels, girls' mothers understood and helped them. In a novel, her mother would have asked Michael Quentin to the house—would have been jubilant in her joy, proud of the material merits of such a marriage. The German Socialist himself saw the usefulness of co-operation and solidarity: his description of the mad welter of competitive trade was only a magnified account of the continual little struggles at the Trathbyes' flat.

It was a struggle between her and her mother: it

had begun when her lips had drunk in day by day something of her mother's life and joy, her strength and beauty.

VI

At the Eire Club Drusilla and Michael said good-bye.

"May I write to you?" Michael said, suddenly looking into her eyes.

"Yes," Drusilla said happily. It seemed to him that she understood and, indeed, for the moment she did.

When she got home she went to say good night to her mother, and told her that Michael had asked if he might write. Essie would have kept silence: but Drusilla was warmly anxious to do right. She was full of happy hopes. Four months would pass quickly when she had Michael's letters lying near her heart.

Mrs. Trathbye tried not to ask to see the first letter; but her resolution broke down and she said to her daughter, with a brutal assumption of authority:

"Show me that letter."

Drusilla showed it. It comforted Mrs. Trathbye that the letter could be truly described as being one that anybody might have written. Drusilla was faintly saddened by it: she read it over and over again, trying to breathe warmth into it. She did not wear it over her heart, but resolved to keep that resting-place for one more familiar and fond.

Other letters followed. Michael sent them at respectful intervals: he wrote them reverently. Often he changed phrases which (he feared) might startle her maidenhood out of its sweet dreaming-time, in a misty atmosphere suffused with the light of love. . . . The poor fellow was not an easy letter-writer;

and always behind his guarded words there was his conviction that her soul would awake and understand. She lay in her sleep sentinelled by roses : she must be awakened only by the touch of lips that had prayed themselves into a purity to equal hers. He would expel everything vile and presumptuous from his acts and words and thoughts : his life would be all an oblation—of faith in God, of courtesy to his fellows. Often he checked the impulse to kiss the paper where her name was signed.

“ Ah, I don’t see any sense in keeping up the correspondence,” Mrs. Trathbye said. “ It’s foolish. . . . Just so that people may think you have an admirer.”

“ Who ? The postman, Mother ? ” Drusilla said, with her pretty tolerant laugh. But her heart had sunk ; it sank a little lower at each of these comments, vulgarising and doubt-creating. The magnetism of Michael’s presence was removed : the Eire Club had become a nightmare of half-filled benches and clattering voices : it seemed to her that Miss Morland looked gibingly at her when Michael was mentioned ; and at home the materialities of life, the four narrow walls and the meagre interests they enclosed, pressed ever more closely on her heart. At the club and at home Alexander Cowie bulked ever more largely in her life, was ever more importunate and more familiar, and—oddly—more endurable.

It was a hard winter for the Trathbyes. Poor John, in debt, wrote at Christmas-time, asking them to lend him as much money as they could scrape together. They had been expecting John on a visit, and this substitute produced a miserable dullness. Mrs. Trathbye refused to buy any cakes or to accept any

presents. They had already bought materials for a plum-pudding, so they made one, but as it left the cloth it seemed to have a funereal blackness instead of the usual air of jollity, and it split into three under the hands of Aunt Caroline, who burst into loud sobs. The morning post had brought Drusilla a Christmas greeting from Michael and a slender volume of Francis Thompson: she had hardly dared to show it, it seemed such a bright thing in the general gloom. . . . And another postman rang, presenting a cake for Mrs. Trathbye and a box of gloves for Drusilla. Alexander Cowie's card lay in each box.

"Ten times the price of anything you ever got from Michael Quentin," Mrs. Trathbye said, laughing, wiled into cheerfulness by the complimentary cake. The words and the look that went with them remained with Drusilla. It was amazing to her that her mother should be able to think of Cowie seriously as a suitor: it made her angry. The expression fleeting across Mrs. Trathbye's eyes confessed: "I spoiled your chance with Michael Quentin—I'm still trying to spoil it. I can't help it, I feel sorry and I'm offering you Alick Cowie as indemnity."

"He'd no right to send me these," Drusilla said, flushed. "Mother, should I send them back?"

Mrs. Trathbye made a mocking face.

"Little Miss Propriety!" she simpered. "If you're too proud to wear them yourself give them to Kathleen."

It was bewildering. But Drusilla divined that the first sign on her part of favouring Cowie would be the signal for her mother's opposition. Cowie came up the next day, offering tickets for a dance; and she thanked him gently for the gloves but refused to

accept any other gift from him or to accompany him to the dance.

"Of course we don't go to dances with young men!" she said, laughing.

Cowie looked at her admiringly. It was desolating to realise that she had only made him esteem her the more. She was such a "ladylike girl."

"When are you going to give me the right to take you to dances?" Cowie said, after he had arranged to take "wee Aggie" instead.

"I can't ever do that, Mr. Cowie," Drusilla said very earnestly. But Cowie looked at her with a laugh in those strange frivolous eyes of his and went away unbelieving.

It was abominable to have to go about, with Essie and Kathleen, or with the neighbour's daughter, Amy Cartwright, and to gaze at the charming things in the shop-windows and not have a penny to buy anything. Essie expressed herself "fed up" with the whole thing: she was never again going to try to save money, for it meant nothing but denying herself things that she wanted so that her mother might take the money and give it to John.

"To pay his bills at the inn and his losses at cards!" Essie said. Aunt Caroline and Mrs. Trathbye had said a great deal about warm clothing for the winter. The state of John's socks had been dwelt upon as specially lamentable: yet it seemed unlikely that he should want forty pounds for socks. . . .

Hearing this outburst of Essie's, as they stood in front of a charming shop-window in Sauchiehall Street, Drusilla marvelled anew at her sister's discretion. Essie seemed to know how to avoid direct discussion with her mother and aunt: her point of

view must be much as theirs—except in this matter of John. It was not possible to make Essie speak of a thing like a love-affair. Up till a few months ago, she had shown a phlegmatic version of her mother's dislike to speech on the subject. Now, Drusilla wondered—glancing at her sister's dull face—what thoughts the shop-windows were stirring in her heart.

"It's funny the way women feel about men," Drusilla said. "I believe mother and Aunt Carlie would sacrifice anything to John just because he's a man."

Essie's face assumed its forbidding look of caution, and she passed on without replying. The next window was full of rose-coloured silks and ribbons.

"Aren't they lovely?" Drusilla sighed. "I'd like to have twenty pounds of my own and to buy and buy——" She was suddenly aware that Essie had moved so that the mirror at the back of the window might not reflect them side by side. And with her consciousness of this Drusilla's heart contracted with a painful sense of loneliness: she wanted to feel in sympathy with Essie.

"You're not likely either to get or to make twenty pounds," Essie said morosely, and they went home empty-handed. Drusilla in her bedroom opened her glove-box and gazed at the grey kids, so soft and sweetly scented. Cowie's ability to buy such things seemed to refine him into a state of less commonness. It was one of those prettinesses, those little decencies, necessary to make tolerable a relationship with a man like Cowie: it was like the distance at which he stood from her, the whiteness of collar and glossiness of boots which marked his aspect when he came into her presence. . . . It was laugh-enkindling to picture

Cowie with hair disordered like Michael Quentin's. That yellow-brown lock—coloured just like sea-wrack—falling on the pure forehead. . . .

Drusilla put away the gloves: she found them smug and abhorrent and thought that she would never wear them. But Cowie came on New Year's Eve with tickets for "The Messiah" to be performed next day in St. Andrew's Hall. Drusilla could not deny herself this joy: she loved music and lived among people who considered the emotionalism produced by it to be an evidence of refinement: the house was terribly dismal, with Aunt Caroline again moping in bed and Mrs. Trathbye crying over John's photograph. How Cowie's eyes twinkled when Drusilla said: "I'll come." She wore a pair of the gloves and blushed when he smiled at them.

The appeal of the glorious music, in the dimness of the big hall, electric-lit and foggy, was more potent and more insidious than the appeal of the soft, sweetly smelling little gloves. Drusilla had often heard that music ministered to one's higher nature: she thought of the starvation of the higher nature in a life without concerts, theatres, and picture-galleries. She looked at the women all around her and wondered if they always had as much joy and culture as they needed, and men to escort them here and there in taxicabs, to draw their coats over their shoulders and pick up things that they dropped. There was something alluring in a man's mere physical courtesies to a woman.

The mingling sounds of the instruments and the confusion of feelings they induced sank into a murmur of expectancy; and the voice of the great soprano rose, like the voice of love over the struggle of emotions

in a human life; a clear voice, passionate, pure, single-hearted, audaciously glad and confident.

"I know that my Redeemer liveth . . ."

"Glorious, isn't she?" Cowie said, at the end of the solo, moved by Drusilla's emotion. . . . "It's a pity these singers get so fat . . . wouldn't need to mind with a voice like that." He laughed tremulously, colouring.

Drusilla laughed too, senselessly, as she hurriedly dried the tears off her cheeks. She was saying to herself, as a prayer, that she would have faith in love. That divine soaring voice, rising from the welter of sounds cried: "*I know!*"

"Won't you come and have some tea?" Cowie said shyly, on the steps. She hesitated, then acquiesced, doubtful if it would be quite a "nice" thing. Cowie put his arm about her and guided her through the red-brown fog in which flared orange and white and scarlet lamps.

They parted at the Trathbyes' door, for, hearing of Aunt Caroline's illness, Cowie refused to go in.

"I hope I may come up—and ask how your aunt is?" he said, with an arch laugh. Drusilla had laughed too before she was aware of it; and suddenly Cowie had caught both her gloved hands, pressing them against his chest, kissing them.

"Don't," Drusilla gasped. "Let go. . . . No, don't, *please*." She got into the house and shut the door, disregarding something that Cowie was saying through the letter-box.

"I was a fool to go," she said to herself passionately. "He cares more than I thought." There was something frightening in Cowie's bodily strength

—in the fact that he could hold her so that she could not escape. And his eyes held something that frightened her too—a dominance, a sureness that took no account of her denials. . . . Oh, it was the confidence of a little life, ignorant of all forces outside its own boundaries : not the superb sureness of a soul that knew God !

“ But I shouldn’t have gone with him,” Drusilla said. “ Poor fellow, he cares a great deal in his own way—and it isn’t right.”

“ We’ve had to send for the doctor for your aunt,” Mrs. Trathbye said, with a reproachful air, as her daughter entered the kitchen. “ I was quite alarmed by the state she was in and I alone in the house with her at the time. No, of course, you can’t do anything now : Essie and Kathleen have been back for hours now and we have done everything there was to do. Upon my word, I thought your aunt was dying : she became perfectly livid and as cold as this knife I’m holding in my hand. . . .”

Aunt Caroline had a long illness ; and in the middle of it there came a letter from an Edinburgh editor to whom Michael’s uncle had written some months ago. The editor stated that he had a vacancy on his staff and would be glad if Miss Trathbye would send in an application.

Aunt Caroline wept piteously. It was a situation beyond her hopes, involving little writing but a good deal of going about to “ functions ” ; and she could not leave her bed and would not be fit for work for at least six months.

“ Ah, isn’t it strange ? Isn’t it a strange thing ? ” Mrs. Trathbye repeated with a gloomy delight. “ Nothing ever goes right with a Trathbye—nor with

my own family either. . . . We might have known it would happen this way with a Trathbye."

Aunt Caroline, comforted by a sense of a great tragic destiny, resigned herself. She was drinking a cup of tea, and lay back among her pillows, looking so meagre and frail that it seemed hardly likely that a full-grown curse would find it worth while to pursue her.

Drusilla flushed vividly at the thought that came to her. The wish to make money was growing stronger and saner in her : she was impatient of the Trathbye hopelessness in herself and in the others. She wanted so many things that she could not have—why shouldn't she work for them as other people did ? In the deeps of her heart there stirred a dim fear of the moods created in herself by those ungratified desires ; reckless moods in which a weak heart was tempted to do vile things ; in which one's very longing for good was debased into an instrument of evil. . . .

The fear of these passions was stronger now than the fear of her mother. There must be some understanding, some pity for her somewhere in her mother's heart ! A woman could not refuse to help her own daughter to be good.

"Mother, couldn't I go in for that situation ?" Drusilla asked, deprecating. "Just to keep it till Aunt Carlie's able to work ?"

But Aunt Caroline, questioned, broke into envious rage and terror. What right had Drusilla to take her work away from her ? Let Drusilla find an editor for herself and not be trying to steal other people's only means of keeping body and soul together. . . . The poor creature's passion was such and so consciously supported by her condition of weakness, that Mrs.

Trathbye, at first not unwilling to consider her daughter's idea, yielded with a : " We'd better say no more about it." It seemed a pity to let this sorely needed salary slip from their grasp ; but Mrs. Trathbye had fallen into a state of mental indolence to which a continued submission to wants and cares was easier than initiative. . . . She had had besides a disquieting vision of Drusilla at functions in frocks and hats which her profession would justify.

" It's insane ! " the respected Essie said to her mother. But Aunt Caroline's state of health fortified her against all attempts at remonstrance. She hid the editor's letter in the fear that her niece might get the address and write on her own behalf.

Drusilla bought newspapers and began to answer advertisements. She would go into a shop—into an office as a beginner. After all she was not twenty-five and, with her hair in a bow, could easily pass as sixteen. She got no answer to her first twenty letters : the twenty-first brought a post card asking her to call at an office.

" Ah, you'll make nothing of it, child," Mrs. Trathbye said. It was a wet day and Drusilla put on an old short skirt under her coat and dressed her hair in a ribbon-bowed loop so that she could let it down as she went up the stairs to the office. The amiable man looked at her.

" You're too young, I'm afraid," he said pleasantly. " We want a young lady of three-and-twenty or so."

The second time that she received a card asking her to call Drusilla put on a long skirt and dressed her hair high : she saw a woman who said that they wanted a girl of fourteen. She received no more replies to her unbusinesslike letters.

VII

At the beginning of February Essie came home one evening with a desperate face and told her mother, shortly, that the business had failed and all the girls must go. She turned with a sullen disgust from her mother's exclamations of wrath at the injustice. "What's the good of talking?" she said; and she recommenced the search for a situation, reading the long columns of *The Mercury* and *The Western World*; trudging here and there, downcast, silent, morose. One night in the bedroom Drusilla looked at Essie undressing and saw tears slipping over her cheeks, and marvelled at her mother's blindness to the existence of the cashier's friend.

"Essie," she said, when they were in bed in the dark, "do you ever see Mortlake now?"

She feared a rebuff; but Essie answered in a voice that quivered:

"No. . . . How could I? He just used to come up to see Bramley."

"I know. . . . But couldn't you see him somehow? I mean, you wouldn't need to let him know you had done anything. Isn't there any way you might meet him again? It seems such a pity to break off what might . . . be a nice friendship."

"How could I?" Essie said. A tinge of hope came into her voice: "Some of the girls do things like that. . . . I don't see how I could: it wouldn't be nice."

"Oh, *nice*!" Drusilla blazed out. "You don't know what it might come to mean to you or to him. Why shouldn't you do it whether it's nice or not?"

"There's no sense in talking like that," Essie said with a cold disapproval; and she sank back into that

respectable, hopeless, mysterious apathy in which most of her life had been spent.

They had not enough of money to pay the doctor and to buy food. Kathleen, the only worker, came and went with a silent, noble patience: the crimson had gone out of her cheeks and the family no longer jested about her plumpness. They had outbursts of tenderness to each other; outbursts of bitterness in which they said horrible things that burned their hearts, followed by foolish weeping reconciliations. Aunt Caroline, since the newspaper episode, could not bear the presence of Drusilla: at the sight of the girl the sick woman would sometimes spring madly from her bed and rush from the room, slamming the door. Drusilla often imagined Aunt Caroline, gone mad, attacking her with a knife and killing her. Once she pictured Aunt Caroline dead, having killed herself; and thence she passed easily to the thought of Aunt Caroline dying of this illness—a result which Mrs. Trathbye frequently prophesied.

It was unthinkably terrible that she should find relief in the thought of Aunt Caroline dead; in the closing of the cruel, stupid, hostile eyes, the silencing of the coarsened yet attenuated voice, with its phrases of tenement slang, the debased vocabulary produced by years of intercourse with washerwomen, charwomen, dealers in old clothes, and tradespeople.

It was a hideous thought: it frightened Drusilla. She found herself arguing that, since such ugly ideas were the products of material miseries, almost any means of escaping from wretched material conditions were justifiable. Then she wondered what fiend had been sent with this thought to tempt her to cast herself down. . . .

She would get work and save herself—from what ? She conceived the idea of going back to the art shop and asking them to help her. It was three years since she had left it, but she felt a warm sense of encouragement at her heart as she recalled the manager's kind eyes.

She went, and found a new manageress and two very smart, staring assistants. The lame young man was dead, they told her, and the manager had gone to a branch at Manchester. The manageress took down her name and address and Drusilla went out, feeling that the assistants were staring at her down-trodden boots and faded skirt.

It was very foggy and the night was closing in. She had no money for the car, and her worn boots, jarring on the pavement, hurt her feet and exhausted her nerves. When she reached Jamaica Bridge she paused, partly because she was annoyed by the dodging on the footpath ; and looked over the granite parapet. The foggy river had a weird effect of an unplumbed pit of darkness : it was solemn, almost shuddersome, yet it had a suggestion of restfulness. Death, she thought, must be like that black peacefulness under the struggling lives on the bridge.

“ Miss Trathbye,” Cowie said. “ Not thinking of suicide ? ”

Drusilla turned. It seemed to her a long time since she had thought of Alick Cowie, or of Grace Morland, or Patullo. She had thought often of Michael Quentin and her realisations of the miseries of physical life : but she could not write to Michael often because it was so difficult to get twopence halfpenny for a stamp ; and Michael always waited for her letter before he wrote again. The thought of him in Athens or Rome,

or in his beautiful house on the Ayrshire coast, was becoming again a fairy-tale, a bright dream-thing which had no obvious link with her daily life. . . . She did not know herself how much of this was owing to physical exhaustion. She had always accepted her beauty and vitality as signs of a strength that could resist what the German Socialist called "unfavourable conditions" to which others must succumb.

"Come along and have some tea," Cowie said familiarly.

"I knew you were going to say that," Drusilla laughed, with a pleasant famishing thought of a cosy room, of cakes and tea, of a drive home in a car.

"Why, you're walking lame, Miss Trathbye!" Cowie said. "What is it? A corn? Or chilblains?"

"I don't get chilblains," Drusilla said, disgusted. Cowie had a lower middle-class habit of talking about diseases. "It's my shoe that's hurting me," she added gently, fearing she had been unkind.

Cowie looked down quickly, and she felt that his eyes—alert to observe obvious things—had noted the dismal condition of her feet. They went towards Burrow's tea-rooms in Union Street, Cowie eagerly making a way for Drusilla through the crowd.

"Reminds you of New Year's Day and 'The Messiah,'" Cowie said. "First of January—im-him! im-him!—and it's two days from the end of February now. Tempus has been fugiting at a fine rate—hasn't the old boy? You haven't been along to the Eire lately?"

"No," Drusilla said. "I've missed all the meetings since Christmas. I've been busy . . ."

Cowie shot a jealous glance at her and her pride was relieved. To be suspected of "going with"

another young man was much more gratifying than to be pitied for the want of inspectable coats and hats.

"Aunt Caroline's been so ill . . ." Drusilla offered.

"Of course," Cowie said, brightening. Suddenly his face was solemn and he thrust out an arm so ostentatiously protective and possessive that Drusilla, affronted, slid from its contact.

"I beg your pardon," Cowie said. "Did I annoy you ? . . . I didn't want that woman to touch you."

Drusilla looked at the woman, who seemed young, with a face of curiously porcelain-like complexion between her big black hat and black furs. It did not seem to be strange that Cowie should have known at once that the woman was untouchable: the knowledge was harmonious with his manliness, his air of citizenship and responsibility. This time his protectiveness brought no feeling of offence but a rather pleasant thrill.

"Do you think these women are to blame?" Drusilla asked, remembering the things that she had read in Miss Morland's Socialist and Suffrage pamphlets. "They are often driven to it by want, aren't they? Because they get such poor wages."

"That is so, no doubt," said Cowie, approving her broadness of view. "There aren't two doubts it's men that are most to blame in this business. Mind you, I think these Militant Suffragettes go too far in the things they say as well as the things they do: but there's a lot of truth in some of their complaints about the economic position of women. Personally, I don't approve of women being in the market as competitors to men at all."

"But they have to earn wages?"

Cowie smiled at her indulgently.

"There's only one ideal career for a woman," he said; "and that's to take care of a husband and children." He piloted her through Burrow's tiled shop into the pretty tea-room behind.

"But there are more women than men?" Drusilla said, with her woeful puzzled air, as she sank down into the cushioned seat.

Cowie smiled again, staring at the parted lips and wide serious eyes. He did not hear what she said, nor attempt to answer it.

Drusilla was slowly pulling off a pair of the gloves that he had given her In the market! She remembered that the German Socialist had spoken of women's beauty as "capital." It seemed not difficult to understand how a girl who was cold and hungry and in fear of the destruction of her good looks and the atrophying of her power to enjoy, might—in a reckless mood—sell herself to a man who was not abhorrent to her. She might do it to hear music to keep her higher nature alive and to have pretty things for the salvation of her refinement. When a girl did that without being married people said that she had committed a great sin—and she *had*, in spite of all the scientific Socialists in the universe! . . . Yet it was strange that when, with just the same motives, she *married* the man . . .

"Pretty room, isn't it?" Cowie's voice came. "What'll you have? Tea," he said pleasantly to the waitress, "and some cream cakes and sandwiches."

Drusilla had eaten nothing since one o'clock, when she had lunched on fried potatoes, dry bread, and cocoa. It was delightful to feel that Cowie was grateful to her for every sandwich or cake that she ate; for during the last month the Trathbyes had

fallen into a ghastly habit of watching each other eat. Drusilla, as the meal went on, was more and more happily conscious of the contrast between it and tea at home. The room was so pretty, so dainty and warm, with its firelight, its shaded lamps, its flowers, its discreet sinking of the commercial in the social aspect. There were gay groups and couples at the tables ; and Cowie was engagingly merry, pretending to think that the currants in the cakes were dead flies and saying : “ Good-bye ” to Drusilla when she accepted a three-storied confection, mosaicked with green and pink. Even that curious middle-aged pompousness and lack of enthusiasm which appeared every now and then in the midst of his boyish glee, was on this occasion not unpleasing to Drusilla. It gave her the feeling that he was so much more responsible than she, that he knew so much better what they were both doing, that she could not blame herself for any rash semblance of “ encouraging ” him.

“ I want to ask you again,” Cowie murmured suddenly in the close leading to the Trathbyes’ house : it was a well of red-brown darkness, for the fog filled it and something had gone wrong with the gaslight. “ No, not just the same question,” Cowie said, laughing tenderly, pressing close to her in the darkness.

“ . . . I want you to take a fortnight to think. This is the 26th of February—take till the 13th of March. Yes, you will ? ”

Cowie had gone, taking it for granted. At night, Drusilla said to Essie, tentatively :

“ Alick Cowie met me in town : he took me to tea at Burrow’s.”

Essie was tying up her brown hair, to the brushing of which she had again become indifferent.

"Is anything going to come of it?" she asked stolidly, with averted eyes.

"Come of it?" Drusilla said stupidly, startled into disingenuousness.

"Yes. If he asks you, are you going to take him? . . . I would if I were you."

"I don't see how you can expect . . ." Drusilla murmured, wounded: but Essie went on, with a kind of dull passion:

"There's nothing wrong with him: he's a good fellow, and good-looking; and he's a doctor if his people *are* common: a doctor's the social equal of anybody. . . . And he's going up in his profession. . . . We're not likely, any of us, to get many chances. Mother doesn't do like other people's mothers. . . . And if we don't get married what's to become of us?—especially poor you when you haven't ever done anything. You're the only one of us that's likely to have such a good chance."

It was this admission, more than anything else, that impressed Drusilla with a sense of crisis: Essie's acknowledgment of her sister's attractiveness was like the laying bare of some long-known but unmentioned family fact—like the inscribing of a dead person's age on a tombstone or the appearance at a wedding of at other times invisible uncles.

"Don't you think you should *care*? . . . Don't you think you should feel you couldn't live without the man . . .?" Drusilla faltered, in face of that great negative weight of things left out of her sister's life.

"I think you should care for your own people," Essie said, obstinately looking away. "What do people mean by falling in love? You get to care for any nice man, just because he's a man, if he's good to

you. I think you must get to be grateful to him for marrying you."

Drusilla muttered an "Oh!" of revolted scorn: but Essie went on with her bitter conviction of her own good sense and the absurdity of all other points of view.

"I don't see what else you can do. You said you wanted to help . . . and it would make a big difference: not just in the food here, but to Kathleen and me. When you've a married sister with a house, you've got chances . . . and you're the good-looking one and the eldest. . . . Mother'll never help us that way. . . . I know I'd do it if I were you."

They put out the light and lay down on their beds and Essie slept. How old she seemed to Drusilla, how awful! She represented the great trivial passive pressing force of material things; weighing on the soul, bearing it down, uncomprehendingly stifling it.

Drusilla said to herself that she would write to Michael, she would tell him the truth, she would cry to him to save her, as she used to call to God: she would not let custom kill her soul.

But daylight snapped the link between the dream world and physical life. She could not *beg* to Michael: no nice girl could tell her wants unasked. It was Michael who was to blame: the pain in her heart blazed into anger: he had gone away, he had written inexpressive letters: everybody said that he could not care. . . . Would an act of defiance bring Michael back? An engaged girl was not *married*.

On the fifteenth of March Miss Morland, in a long, crossed, muddled letter to Michael, wrote skittishly:

“ We have *actually* an engagement to announce at the Eire ! Little Dillie Trathbye and Alick Cowie !! *Everybody* expected it would have been sooner as it was *easy* to see it was a *case*. Alick is getting on *very well* so there is *no reason* why they should not be married soon. . . .”

CHAPTER VI

THE WHITE STUDIO

I

COWIE walked up a plaster-smudged board, and through a doorless doorway on the ground floor of an unfinished tenement in a southern suburb. The place, full of May sunshine, was blithe as a bird-haunted coppice with the whistling and singing of workmen.

Cowie was whistling too, and his eyes were happy as he considered the four little rooms in the ground-floor flat. From the front windows there was a delightful view of a common which Cowie called a "park"; and from the back windows could be seen a sloping piece of waste ground, drab on its bare patches, and intensely green where grasses and hawthorn-bushes were. At the foot of this slope the river Cart gleamed between clayey banks.

There were no doors in the little flat and no windows, and there was a rubbed hole where the kitchen range was to glow. But it was easy for Cowie's warm glad heart to fill the place with warmth and joyaunce. The white, empty rooms, with their raw odours of plaster and wood, did not need for him the benediction of the sunlight. . . . He took out a measuring-tape and, with attentive eyes and a thrust-out under-lip, made sure of the breadth and length of the parlour and the two bedrooms. His mother and sisters were going to give him inlaid linoleum as a wedding present. Essie, Kathleen, and wee Aggie, the prospective bridesmaids, were to buy a set of china. Cowie

looked at the thirteen-paned cupboard built into the parlour wall and visualised it lined with velvet to display the cups and saucers. Then he went back into the kitchen and tried to picture pots and pans and dishes on the shelves: but he failed utterly in this because (he found) he did not know what things were needed, nor where they should hang or stand. So he went to the window-frame, sunny and glassless, and gazed at the green and brown land and the still unbudded hawthorns; and at the sight of the unprotected banks of the river a thought came to him, so beautiful and solemn, so full of wonder and of pain, that his eyes grew wet.

Rolling up his tape, he went out, whistling, to the front of the houses, where he saw a young workman lying on his back on a heap of gold-coloured sand.

"Are the painters anywhere about?" Cowie asked. The workman waved his hand towards a more developed portion of the tenement.

"They're working at the second close," he said, eyeing Cowie humorously.

Cowie found the master-painter; and he too had amused eyes as he considered this young man, so obviously about to be married.

"I wanted to ask you—can I have the woodwork in the parlour and bedrooms all white?" Cowie asked modestly.

"Ah, that'll be the wife's notion—eh?" the painter gurgled. Cowie, laughing and blushing, was willing to be questioned: he wanted to tell the painters all about it—to tell the workman on the sand-heap and those other workmen moving about a gleaming white tank of lime.

The master-painter was of opinion that it could

easily be managed if Cowie asked the landlord in time and was willing to pay a little more

“Folks in your case don’t mind that,” the painter said, jogging Cowie with his elbow. “When’s it to be?”

Cowie replied that it was to be in June, when, they had been told, the house would be quite ready. The painter pouted his lips and raised and dropped his shoulders with the air of a man amusedly sceptical of the words of builders, house-agents, and landlords, and tickled by the simplicity of young couples.

“If you get into it by July . . .” he said.

“We’ll see about that,” Cowie said, with a resolution that might have made a whole tenement spring, painted and furnished, from the soil.

Three weeks later, in truth, the range was built within the kitchen fireplace and the house was papered and painted in the colours that Drusilla herself had chosen. The water was “laid on” in the long green-and-white bathroom and the little blue-and-white scullery: only the electric lights and bells were wanting; and Cowie walked whistling through the park to Lochaber Gardens, to bring Drusilla over to see their new house.

Cowie, in his new brown suit, ran upstairs to the Trathbyes’ flat. His cheeks were very pink and his fringed eyes shone: but his face was dulled into a quiet anger as he heard Aunt Caroline’s voice within:

“What are you touching my books for? I’m sick of the sight of you. I’ll be glad when you’re gone.”

“Old devil!” Cowie muttered as he rang. It was on account of these outbursts of Aunt Caroline—completely unbalanced since her illness—that Cowie’s marriage had been hastened. But he did not feel

grateful to her ; and, though he argued that hers was a "mental case," he hated the futile creature. He looked at her sullenly as she crossed the hall carrying her account-book and pen.

"Can't trust my papers out of my sight," she was muttering. "People wanting to take my work from me. . . ."

She gave Cowie no greeting, for she had transferred to him something of the passion of dislike that she felt against her niece.

"Your aunt looks pretty bad," Cowie said, decently, to Drusilla, as they went downstairs. From the day of their engagement he had spoken of her family affairs with an air of having resolved to be as pleasant and respectful as possible, but with no concessions to her reserves or vanities. Drusilla had been humiliated to find how correctly he had deduced from trifling things that he had observed in her family life. Cowie had no illusions : he had not five thousand a year nor a rainbow-coloured house. He said this himself, humorously, adding that he was accustomed to keep his eyes open. "Of course I knew !" was his laughing exclamation, when Drusilla, ashamed of something said, tried, faltering, to explain. Cowie's medical training enabled him to diagnose, with a briskly scientific air, the cases of Drusilla's relatives. "You'll gen'elly find there's a physical reason at the bottom of bad temper," he said. "Of course you can't pronounce definitely whether the mind begins to affect the body or the body the mind. It's like the riddle about the hen and the egg." He often made allusions to well-known jests and retold old stories ; and Drusilla received them with a gentle feigning of amusement. She had read in the women's

magazines that this was the way to hold a husband's love.

Cowie, of humble means and position and with a chasteningly "common" mother and sisters, did not prick Mrs. Trathbye to the anguish of envy roused by the thought of her daughter's marriage with Michael Quentin. Besides, the state of material misery into which the Trathbys had fallen made Cowie's gifts things for which to be grateful; and, more potent than this, was Mrs. Trathbye's sensitiveness to the young man's masculinity, to his talk and fun and vivacity. He was very generous; and his mother and sisters had the same good-nature, the same warm hospitality. They admired Mrs. Trathbye candidly. "Your mother's so lady-like," they said to Drusilla; and the compliment gave Mrs. Trathbye the feeling that her mere presence in the Cowie's house was more than a fair exchange for the plentiful teas and suppers, the gifts of flowers and fruit and honey and cakes and tickets. "We can't entertain," Mrs. Trathbye said, flushing, with a smiling haughtiness, to Alick Cowie's mother. "My husband's property . . ." And Cowie's mother—who, amazingly, was not fat, but a little thin alert person—answered with a scolding kindness. Mrs. Trathbye's bow, on the presentation of their friends, was a thing in which the Cowies gloried. . . . It is true that the girls did not make friends, as Cowie could have wished them to do, with Essie and Kathleen; and that even Drusilla, determinedly sweet to them, did not seem to pierce to the inner heart of his family. Bessie, dark-haired and bright-complexioned like her brother, but with a thinned cheek and a coarsened bloom, was a professional elder sister; tender, with just a touch of

patronage, to her mother, respectful to her brother, laughingly indulgent to her sister. She was many years Cowie's senior. Drusilla had not yet recovered from the surprise of seeing "wee Aggie," whom she had pictured as a glossy-haired child of ten : for Aggie was nearly her own age and appeared to her much older—a great, jolly creature with earrings and a deep laugh ; creamy complexioned, laboriously coiffured, and decidedly dressed. She hung about Drusilla, affectionately, with a little-girlish admiration.

"You're *awfully* pretty in that," Aggie said every time Drusilla changed her frock, or hat, or collar. "Crivens, I wish't I'd hair like yours ! . . . You've such a lovely mouth." Drusilla grew fond of Aggie.

It was only now and then that Mrs. Trathbye's envy of her daughter still out-flashed. For example, she did not like any congratulating friend to allude to the good looks of Cowie ; and she could not bear any demonstration on his part towards Drusilla. But on this latter point she had little ground for complaint. Drusilla was very shy : she would hardly allow Cowie to touch her, he said ; and he exulted in this delicacy of hers, yielding to her restrictions so that she felt relieved. Yet once he had caught her to him, roughly, irresistibly, muttering : "Just *wait* ! . . ." It had frightened and dishonoured her and she had wept ; and Cowie had asked her forgiveness, tenderly, but with a humorous air of knowing that women's tears were all pretence, and their reserve a wile to keep up their value.

They went about together, looking for furniture for the new flat. Cowie avoided cheap shops, and conscientiously preferred dulled hues and simple designs : he had learned that an avowed love of rich colours

stamped people as vulgar. "Beautiful, isn't it?" he said, of all things grey-green or blue-grey. He made jokes about shiny pictures and noisy carpets. "Better to get a few nice carbon prints," he said, before a fluffy brown Corot. "There's nothing so bourgeois to my mind as folks with wee rooms aping the customs of folks with big ones. My, I've seen folks with a picture that covered the whole of one of their walls; and a gold frame—pfui!—all over wi' flowers and scrolls and bunches of grapes." In his animation Cowie forgot to use his literary society diction: his speech was almost like Aggie's; and the artlessness of it struck Drusilla pleasantly. It was satisfactory, too, to find Cowie so reasonable and (it seemed to her) refined in his ideas about furnishing. She was timid herself and rather vague: but he received all her suggestions with an eager respect that bracingly contrasted with the contempt and bitterness which her family showed in this matter.

"A nice-looking house *she'll* have!" Kathleen said; and Essie was disturbingly silent about most of the articles purchased.

"She's anæmic," Cowie said cheerfully. "I saw it as soon as I looked at her lips. . . ." He brought a bottle of port wine for Essie, and advised her to eat porridge. He would have attended Aunt Caroline free of charge; but she said in his hearing that she preferred "a decent doctor" and he went away temporarily huffed. But the next day he reappeared with his air of dutiful pleasantness and said to Drusilla:

"I'm sorry for your aunt: there's no two doubts an unmarried woman of a certain age is a miserable sort of creature. . . . They form a large percentage of the suicide cases—did you not know that?"

He had a habit of saying : “ Did you not know that ? ” It irritated Drusilla and even puzzled and disappointed her : for it was a part of the non-romantic attitude of his mind towards her. He was plainly very much in love with her : but she found that that phrase, as commonly interpreted, left out of account much that existed in Cowie’s feelings and implied much that was lacking. Cowie seemed curiously inobservant of, even insensible to, her beauty : indeed she saw that he was genuinely surprised when others spoke of it. She found that he did not know if she were tall or short ; if her hair were curly or smooth, plentiful or scanty. Her sex attracted him, not her beauty : he loved her womanhood, not her maidenhood. His iterated question : “ Did you not know ? ” expressed his impatient irreverence of maidenly ignorances, of dreams and wilful delays ; his desire to thrust upon her knowledge and responsibility. He was nearly always cheerful : he had moods of blitheness, when the red blood, running freshly in his body, excited him to merriment and mischief and the follies of happiness : but always, underneath, she divined that strange contented undreaming, unaspiring self with its eyes set on material things, the pompous flippancies precious to middle age. She felt that he was in haste to be old : that it was his will that she should be old beside him. Yet the idea would surely have seemed absurd to any outsider ; for it seemed as if he were giving her a good time such as she had never had before—a glad dazzling time of spring and summer days. He took her out a great deal : she became familiar with the beautiful country places around Glasgow as they looked in April and May. They tramped the wet sunny roads between

hedges unthinkably bright : they crossed moorlands just waking to life : they played golf on emerald slopes set in a landscape of crimson-brown woods just fired with green : they lay in woods of hyacinths, and she saw Cowie's handsome fresh face laugh at her from daisied fields and the exuberance of hawthorn bloom. The power of taking railway tickets and going to such places seemed a wonderful thing, giving a man control over the souls of his fellows ; and she saw in the fields and the woods other couples : the earth seemed full of them : it was as if all human beings had become paired, like the cards in the game of "Old Maid." She saw them at dusk, in the shadows of trees and hedges, standing silent, close-clasped ; and she told herself that a man's manhood drew a woman's womanhood and Love came of it and happiness. . . . There was another thing of which she had dreamed but it was a bright madness.

Cowie preferred even to going into the country to do what he called a "swank down Sauchie." It was his colloquial way of speaking of Sauchiehall Street. It seemed that he had many acquaintances who also "swanked" on the bright spring afternoons ; for he passed with noddings and smilings and liftings of his hat. The footpaths were athrong with people : the shops glittered with brilliant brass and plate-glass and glowed with colours : the picture-palaces showed daintily, little white-domed doorways with variegated bills. Flower-sellers stood by the kerbs with tightly tied nobbles of violets, with tossing shining loads of daffodils, narcissi, and tulips and the sunny gold foam of mimosa splashing over these ; or, as April yielded to May and May to June, with marguerites and marigolds and roses. On the pavement there were

the hum and crash of the cars, the twanks of motor-horns, the rattle of cabs and carts. Sandwichmen filed past with the bills of music-halls : groups of girls loitered, with the rich western complexion, the soft dark western eyes. People darted into doorways, or rushed from them, carrying parcels and letters. And always Alexander Cowie was at Drusilla's side, grasping her elbow when she mounted a car or crossed the street, drawing her to a shop window to ask her if she would like such and such a thing, feeding her in tea-shops, paying for her entrance to picture-palaces, calling her attention to some tempting theatrical bill. He was like the incarnation of the city's life—a frivolous life of bread-winning, of shop-gazing, tea-drinking, pleasure-hunting, hurrying ; a life that took no count of solemn dreams.

Was it not best for her to forget Michael Quentin ? He had not accepted her challenge : her engagement to Cowie had not brought him back, desperate, wildly protesting. She had only dreamed that he loved her. . . . And Cowie was good to her : he loved her so much that sometimes, suddenly, his eyes grew dark and wet and his voice failed. Cowie would always be kind to her : for he was very good to his mother and sisters, and the ladies' papers said that that was an infallible sign. His manners in public were certainly open to criticism : but she noticed that, in the house, he would not allow his mother to lift a heavy kettle ; and he cleaned all the boots. The Cowies had no servant, but he and Drusilla were to have one when they were married. . . .

He took her about a great deal, and she was generally so tired at night that she fell asleep quickly. If she ever happened to have an empty evening or

afternoon she filled it by going to a dressmaking class and working, with an intense sort of industry, at her trousseau.

How could she hear the voice of love, fear-filling, terribly sure and passionate, crying: "I *know*?" It rang always in the empty depths of her heart: but it sounded far away and dull and dreamlike. Near to her there was the snip of scissors and the rending of stuffs, the whirr of the sewing-machine, the rustle of tissue-paper, the clash of forks and spoons—and Cowie's voice.

"Ah, you'll not get many presents," Mrs. Trathbye said wistfully. But it was surprising how many Drusilla was getting, or rather how many were being sent to the popular Cowie.

"I'm glad I'll soon be taking you away," Cowie said as they went through the shade and sunshine of the luxuriantly green park. "It isn't a wholesome atmosphere for you to have to live in with that awful, morbid old wife. *My* theory is that the sexes have a salutary influence on each other—that masculine qualities act, as it were, as alkaloids to feminine acids." He advanced these commonplaces always with the air of a pioneer; and, as Drusilla was not readily responsive to this one, he repeated it with a touch of indignant surprise. "An exclusively feminine household isn't wholesome," he said.

"No," Drusilla assented. "But I don't think men quite understand—I mean they overrate their importance to women. If women had real careers and education and were paid and respected like men . . ."

Cowie shook his head, smiling archly: he was amused by her feminine disingenuousness.

"No, but really, Alick!" Drusilla protested. She

addressed him thus : but she still always spoke of and thought of him as "Cowie." "Men think all a woman's misfortunes are summed up in not being married," she said. "But the funny thing is women hardly ever *want* to get married—just for the sake of being married, I mean. . . ."

Cowie was smiling more broadly.

"I'm sure Aunt Caroline never wanted to marry any one," Drusilla said. "I dare say she's angry now because she didn't, but that's different ; or perhaps she's angry because she didn't want it, or because other people didn't want it."

"There's a want of perspicuity," Cowie said, laughing. "My *dear* lassie, you're like all the rest of your sex—and I love you all the better for it, Dillie dear. But the ladies never can be persuaded to look facts in the face. Take your own case now, for example. If women don't want to marry men, as you say, why, may I ask, are you marrying me ?—as, please God, you're going to do on the twentieth of June. I know you're not doing it for my money"—Cowie laughed happily—"so I infer that it must be for myself. Now, deny it if you can, you deceitful woman !"

They were in a narrow path, deep set among dark-leaved, pale-blossomed rhododendrons, and in this solitude Cowie again came close to her, pressing his arm about her. Drusilla, withdrawing, walked on in silence.

"The Eire's going to give us a present, did you know ?" Cowie said as they entered the new flat. "Very handsome of them : I told Moore of course I wasn't expecting anything of the kind. Well, here we are."

The curious dulled state in which Drusilla had been living for months—a state in which only her material needs seemed alive and keenly enjoying—made it easy for her to recover from the effect of Cowie's words. She had felt indeed that she *ought* to be made ashamed by them, rather than that she actually was so : it was as if a drug had stupefied a part of her or a knife removed it, and the mutilated body was living on, eagerly eating and drinking and resting, with only now and then a sleepy sense that something was gone. Once in the night, in the time between waking and sleeping, the thought had come to her that a world that had finally flung away God might go on living as she was doing.

A girl in a novel, marrying as she was doing, would, she knew, have gone over the new house with “a sick feigning” of interest. But she had taken pleasure in it from the first—in mental pictures of the rooms as they would look when finished and in fancying compromises between her æsthetic sense and the landlord's obstinacies regarding woodwork and cupboards and wallpapers “contracted for for the whole land.” Her comfort-loving, intensely domestic nature exulted in the prettiness, the cleanliness, the freedom from associations : her cramped instincts for managing and planning and tending expanded with a fresh hope of realisation. Even the gas cooking-stove was quite unlike that stove which the Trathbys had hired, long ago, from the Corporation ; which had been so quarrelsomely cleaned, which had been so bitterly charged (by Aunt Caroline) with having doubled the gas accounts ; which had been finally given up by Mrs. Trathbye, weeping, wounded, resentful, surmising that Caroline hated the stove because its installation

had been *her* idea. Now Drusilla was looking at her own stove, tall, glittering, with a spacious copper boiler. There was no one save herself to empty or fill that boiler ; no one to spill milk or leave saucepans to boil over on the top of the stove ; no one to say, in self-assertion : “ Is it necessary to have that gas burning so long ? . . . ” With a sense of achievement she opened and closed the heavily clutching door of the oven ; she visualised pies and cakes on the shelves—*her* pies and *her* cakes, unmocked, unopposed, in a splendid inviolability. As she raised her head her face was flushed.

“ *Dearie* ”—Cowie gasped, swooping down on her. He embraced her tightly, and for a moment her eyes were held by his, shining, jubilant, misted with tears. . . . She freed herself and went into the bedroom : where the drug was again in complete control as she imagined her frocks hanging uncrushed in the new wardrobe.

“ It was nice of you, Alick,” she said, gently praising the whiteness. Even in the hall the woodwork was white, and Cowie had remembered to get a white seat built into the little recess : she had worked two cushions for it to harmonise with the old-rose paper on the walls.

“ Isn’t white the right thing for you ? ” Cowie said. “ On the twentieth of June—my bride ! . . . ”

“ Don’t Alick ! You’re hurting me.”

Cowie mimicked her.

“ Coquette ! ” he said.

Mrs. Trathbye’s opinion was that it would be wise for Drusilla to be married in a nice costume and hat. Aunt Caroline said that white silk would certainly make her look very stout. But the Cowies were

clamorous for a white wedding for the beautiful bride ; and Mrs. Cowie asked to be permitted to supply Drusilla's dress and veil.

"Doesn't she look a picture?" Mrs. Cowie said on the wedding morning. It was she who had fastened the dress and set the veil and wreath on the glowing hair. Mrs. Trathbye stayed in the other room ; and Drusilla thought that this was a thing which, later, would impress her as cruel and painful. But just now the drugged sensation was so overwhelming that she spoke of it to Essie.

"It's the excitement," Essie said tenderly. It was strange to be hugged—carefully, on account of the white silk—by her and Kathleen and to see them crying.

"There's the cab," Kathleen said chokingly. Mrs. Trathbye rushed into the bedroom, pressed, sobbing, against her daughter, kissing her greedily and noiselessly as a mother kisses a sleeping infant.

"Now God Almighty bless you. . . ."

Later, Drusilla and Cowie came out on to the sunlit steps of the church. Drusilla knew that there was a crowd of smiling faces about her and that she had a smooth gold ring beside the diamond ring on her finger. The calm sense of unreality held her strongly : she noticed each face and figure near at hand, detaching itself from the crowd ; and, with the same dreaming composure, she recalled the china-like face of the girl in the fog that afternoon in February. She remembered having read somewhere that these women nearly always drugged themselves in some way or other so that what they did might not be unendurable to them. . . . This, too, seemed a thought that, coming to one awake, might seem painful and significant.

She passed, white, over the cardinal-red carpet ; and the sun fell about her "tenderly as about a helpless thing."

II

Michael Quentin and old Patullo came back to Scotland in September ; and a few days later Michael came to the Mission Rooms in Groome Street.

Miss Morland had met them at the station on the day of arrival, and had seemed to Michael to be improved in health and in dress. She was voluble in her accounts of the work of the Mission and the Eire Club : catching up one of Patullo's bags, she strode along the thronged platform, now separated from Michael and Patullo by intervening hurrying humans, now lurching against a porter's barrow or sidling up to a pair of strangers, then dashing away with an : " I say ! Beg pardon ! "

" You'd better keep it till we get in somewhere," Patullo said with an irritated laugh. It was a relief to Michael, whom Miss Morland's shouting made suffer : but he felt that Patullo was hardly glad to see her.

At the Mission Rooms Miss Morland, not quite inquisitively, spoke of the marriage of Drusilla and Cowie. She had sent them a flower-pot, she said, and a fender-stool, and she characteristically added that these things were handsome and had cost a lot. The Eire Club had given them a revolving bookcase.

" Very nice," Michael said.

Racie, engaged at the office, had not been able to meet his friend on his home-coming : but he had come that evening to the Mission Rooms. He stood

looking at Miss Morland: pale, in his neat light overcoat, his crush-hat held under his arm. He showed nervousness when Miss Morland spoke of Drusilla and Cowie.

"Do they still come to the meetings?" Michael asked.

"Oh, no, they've quite given us up!" Miss Morland said with her wearisome brightness. "They've got other things to do."

Racie, smileless, began to tell Michael about the public lectures last spring: they had been fairly successful and Michael contemplated others, of more importance, during the coming winter. His idea was that the money obtained by these lectures, and the club subscriptions, should be used for the expansion of the Mission, which might, in time, be entirely supported in such ways. . . . Michael and Racie discussed it at Mrs. Wylie's that night, sitting late over a fire.

"There's a plan come into my head——" Michael said.

Racie looked at him with an emotional amusement. It was reassuring to hear Michael beginning to talk rubbish about plans: for even Racie's resolve to be sane and cynical could not resist the fact that Michael was changed. How? And had the prolongation of his absence been due to a need more personal than the healing of Patullo? Racie tried to ascertain: but his habit of arguing from conclusions instead of from premises left him in a troubled nescience.

"What a fool that woman is!" he said suddenly. "Miss Morland, I mean." He felt a bitterness against her, a fear of a certain thing that she might repeat.

"Why?" Michael asked: it occurred to Racie that six months ago Mick would have rebuked him for calling a lady a fool.

"She's so fearfully tactless . . . and boisterous. Everybody gets sick of her. Even old Patullo was half sick of her, I believe, before he left. So you're quite contented with your success there?"

"I hope it's all right," Michael said solemnly. "I believe it is: the appetite seems to be gone. Doesn't he look different?"

"Wonderfully so," Racie said, encouraging.

"I shouldn't say Miss Morland was tiresome," Michael went on. "She's curiously interesting to me, in fact. So's Patullo . . . I wonder if lives like theirs haven't a quite special sort of significance."

"Lives . . . ?"

"Broken lives," Michael said. "Wasted lives, as they're called. Lives that are smashed into pieces."

Racie was moving uneasily, fearful of the turn that the talk was taking. Why had he interrupted Michael in speech of his plan?

"I don't see what reason you have for saying Miss Morland's life has been smashed into pieces," he said quizzically.

"Any one could see it," Michael said with a certitude beyond contempt. "Any one that . . . knew anything, I mean. . . . Never mind. Sometimes I wonder if the souls of these people, on higher planes, have consented to the sacrifice of their earthly lives—if they are offering them, broken up as they are, so that they may be taken and other lives built up out of them. . . . Patullo said once that men might make the most wonderful and meaningful holy temple out

of the broken pillars of old peoples. . . . I feel somehow as if Miss Morland and Patullo *meant* something to my life. I shouldn't dare to despise them. There's a kind of grandeur in having one's life riven to pieces."

"Are you sure it isn't disintegration?" Racie asked. "The results, after a time, might look much the same." He went on nervously, in his fear for Michael, gulping at the beginnings of words: "Besides I thought you believed in mending broken lives, not in swallowing them up. Isn't that what you've been trying to do with Patullo?"

"I suppose so," Michael said, with his peaceful inconsistency. "I was thinking of Miss Morland rather than of Patullo."

"You *said* Patullo, you know," Racie said.

"Well, I don't care," Michael said. "I haven't developed the thought: I'm just chasing it. You can consider an idea without nailing it down as your creed. . . . I mean, I've been wondering if sacrifice isn't the very source of life, and if I'm not mistaken in trying to make plans for bringing happiness to people?"

"Ah, that's comprehensible," Racie said. "You mean it's not worth while to patch the broken lives: better to scrap them and make new ones."

"Journalese," Michael murmured. "I mean the souls on a higher plane may use the apparent destruction of these earthly lives as the best way of serving other lives. Perhaps there's a social meaning in 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit . . . ' Some people seem to be used as finger-posts all along the way of life."

"How not to do it!" Racie murmured. "Poor

beggars. . . . You don't . . . ?" He looked up scaredly.

"I don't mean myself," Michael said smiling. "A man may make a lot of mistakes. . . . His life isn't broken to pieces unless the *basis* of it is smashed."

"The basis of yours?" Racie suggested.

"The basis of mine is faith in God," Michael said; "and the wish to do something for men. That couldn't go to pieces, you know—it *couldn't*. It's an eternal basis. . . . It couldn't be broken."

"Well, I'll take your word for it," Racie said with a lightening of heart. It was a relief to find that Michael was as much of a fool as ever. He could not have cared for the girl. . . . As for the unescapable if undefinable changes in his face and voice—Racie tried to attribute these to travel, or a cold, or foolish experiments in reformed diets. . . . Racie drank another glass of wine, lighted another cigarette, and snuggled down into the arm-chair with a delightful sense of having got Michael back again.

"About your plan, Mick?"

"Yes," Michael said. "Of course it isn't final. It doesn't express any conviction to which I've struggled. I told you just now I doubted if there were any use in doing things until you're sure what you're meant to do. . . . Only I've got the money and I can't help trying to lessen human misery until I'm told on good authority that misery brings the world closer to God."

"If it does we must be bumping up against Him," Racie said.

Michael laughed. "Perhaps we are," he said, with his self-conscious intensity. "And we can't see Him in the dark."

"Well, Patullo isn't here to admire that figure—so tell me about your plan instead," Racie said. The assurance that Michael had never been attracted by the girl, that there had been absolutely nothing mysterious between him and her, made it again possible to laugh at Michael, to be rude to him.

Michael, pitching forward in his chair, linking his hands about his knees, spoke eagerly of the plan. He was going to buy a site somewhere, in town, and build some ideal little dwellings for the poor people of the Eire Mission. He must have the site in town because so many of the people went to work. . . . He was going to build baths, and a gymnasium and a day nursery.

"You see, the conditions of my mother's will prevent me from using my money for any political purpose," Michael said; "or I should do something for Home Rule. . . . I used to kick against the will, but now I don't mind so much: I'm beginning to see it's one's fellow-humanity, not one's fellow-nationality. . . . Still, I think it's as well for me to *begin* with the Eire: it's definite. . . . I see now I've always been expecting too much of people, and getting too impatient when they didn't come up to my ideas. I'll take time: I'll stick to the Eire and give them a chance to shape."

"You're getting quite sensible," Racie said in his appreciation of the Eire as contrasted with a love-affair with Drusilla.

"I've often had thoughts of starting a Socialist paper," Michael said, as if to disprove the statement.

"Oh . . . guck! . . . " Racie inarticulated.

"If I could get a good man to edit it for me,"

Michael said, looking at him with eyes full of an indignant reproach.

Racie took out a copy of *The Mercury*. It contained a short article of his and several paragraphs; coldly written, in the dullest, most formal newspaper language that could express his self-contempt.

"Put that rag away!" Michael cried. He caught at it and they wrestled. Michael threw the paper into the fire and leaned back, flushed, laughing on a high note.

"There's only one other thing," Racie said, his hand on the arm of his friend's chair. "The money was fearfully muddled, you know. Is Patullo to have it again? . . . There was talk about him in the club: they said he'd some drain on his resources—a drunken wife or something. . . ."

"It's all right," Michael said. "I think it would be good for him—it would keep up his self-respect."

"It's a temptation," Racie said. "If we have those big lectures in public halls there'll be sums passing through his hands. . . . You said he'd apply to you if he wanted. . . . Men are queer beggars."

"Yes," Michael said angrily. "Some men are queer. Some men struggle against friendship—Patullo's not like that. You mean he'd find it easier to rob me than to ask me. . . . I don't believe it."

Racie was silent, looking a little ashamed. Going away, he mused on the extraordinary character of Michael Quentin. Michael was changed: was the change one of development, rather than of alteration? He seemed to have absorbed something, in truth, from the broken life of Patullo—or from . . . ?

Racie checked himself with an impatient shrug of his shoulders. It had been a mistake of his about

Miss Trathbye : it was ridiculous, in the face of such strong evidence to the contrary, to allow that persistent suspicion that there had been something between Miss Trathbye and Michael. The thought came again and again, a real thing putting to flight the shifts and sophistries of his reasoning. Racie resolved not to go to bed, but to write that article on the Irish situation for *The Mercury*. He sat down by the smoky fire in his sitting-room and wrote the title on his block :

“Kerrymen and Derrymen.”

He had meant to say that the struggle between the north and south bade fair to become as poignant as the proverbial conflict between the east and west. He had meant to compare the Orange and Green to the Kilkenny cats, and to suggest, jocularly, that the residue of tail-tips would be as much as the Empire would care to keep of both parties. Thoms might make a cartoon embodying this figure. . . . Pyeugh ! Any rotten rubbish would do for *The Mercury*, and the rottener the better. He was going to knock the thing off in twenty minutes. . . .

Twenty-five minutes passed. Racie, holding the block inscribed with the words “Kerrymen and Derrymen,” had thought continuously of Michael Quentin. It was not possible to predicate of Michael that he would behave in such and such a fashion. Remembering Michael’s habitual politeness to God, Racie smiled as he told himself that Michael might be capable of offering God the fruits of a disappointment in love. The witticism seemed to demand utterance, and Racie was irked by the fact that he was alone.

III

Mrs. Wylie, talking with the extra garrulity proper to the welcome of a home-comer, had lighted the gas in Michael's bedroom, and pointed to two new picture frames on the wall.

"My son Wilfrid made these, Mr. Quentin—of fir-cones and beech-nuts and acorns he's been collecting."

"Very clever," Michael said, smiling. After Mrs. Wylie had gone he stood, the smile on his lips, considering the hexagonal frames embossed with little cones in a shining welter of varnish. He was sleepy and not in a particularly sad mood : he believed that the worst of the struggle was over—the agony and astonishment of those weeks immediately following the news of Drusilla's engagement. He had convinced himself (he thought) that he had made a mistake : Drusilla must love Cowie, however grotesque and incredible it seemed. Michael had, in truth, behaved somewhat in the fantastic fashion that Racie, sarcastic, had surmised : he had tried to learn from his loss : he believed that he had learned. He had prayed for Drusilla : once or twice even, in a frenzy of quixotry, he had sent up prayers for Alexander Cowie. He had prayed that the love that he might not pour out on a girl might be sanctified, might be deepened and broadened into a great stream of pity for suffering humanity. He said to himself with a laugh that sorrow was meant to have a centrifugal, not a centripetal, effect ; and with the return of the power to smile at himself there had come a quietening of his pulses. In the peace of his soul his sorrow showed as a beautiful, holy thing. . . .

Yet there had been a sense of disappointment when Grace Morland had said that Drusilla and Cowie never came to the Eire.

IV

At Lochaber Gardens Essie was sleeping alone in the bed that she and Drusilla used to occupy. She was roused by a sound in the room and looked up uncomprehendingly into the face of her mother. Mrs. Trathbye, in her grey-blue dressing-gown, was carrying a taper.

"What's the matter?" Essie complained.

"There's something *most remarkable* going on next door," Mrs. Trathbye said with dramatic gestures that spattered the taper's wax over the bedclothes.

"I wish you'd mind what you're doing, Mother," Essie said. "And I wish you wouldn't come waking me up this way. It's hard enough to get to sleep."

"Ah! . . ." Mrs Trathbye uttered, reproachful; and went on with her incoherent statements. "The noise and uproar was like nothing I've ever heard in my life. Upon my honour, I was certain the house was coming down and your aunt was nearly mad with terror. . . ."

"What *was* it?" Essie cried.

"Ah, how can I tell you what it was? There's something very far wrong at Patullo's. He looked so decent when he came back I thought to myself: 'That man's really going to try to change his life.'"

"Oh, if he's drunk, that's nothing," Essie said. "But I didn't think he ever got noisy——"

Kathleen suddenly cried out from the hall-door, where she and Aunt Caroline were on their knees peeping through the letter-box. Mrs. Trathbye

rushed excitedly from the room and Essie had to resist an impulse to follow her.

"A funny-looking woman's come out of his house," Kathleen said. "She distinctly said something about Miss Morland."

Aunt Caroline contradicted.

"She did not. She said something about brown holland."

Mrs. Trathbye hastened to the parlour window and leaned out; the figure of a woman, short and wide, came quickly from the close and, with something frantic in its gait, went down the street. Mrs. Trathbye was aware of Patullo, at his own oriel, pale-faced in the darkness, watching the woman go.

V

"She wasn't happy at home," Miss Morland had said to Racie and to many other people. This was the thing that Racie feared that the fool of a woman might repeat in Michael's presence. And there was no knowing what effect it might have on Michael, whose composition was an unknown thing. . . . Racie cursed himself, wondered at himself, reassured himself: but always there fluttered in his heart those fears for Michael Quentin.

It was a comfort that, at the next few meetings of the club, the woman was occupied in talking about Patullo. Racie compared her to an over-full cup of weak tea, slopping over into the saucer: she could not help speech of what was in her mind: she risked slander and derision to obtain a listener.

"Isn't it *awful*, Mick?" she said to Michael. "Mr. Patullo's wife has found him. Such an abomin-

able woman. Oh, yes, I know her, I've seen her often before ! She has found his address and she's been up at his house several times ; and the other day she came up when I was there and she made the most *awful* row, and insulted me. I *was* amused. Isn't it scrumptious ? . . . She said it wasn't proper for me to be such good friends with Mr. Patullo ! . . . Did you ever hear anything like it ? ”

As Michael had heard things almost identical spoken of Miss Morland's friendship with Patullo, he was embarrassed. A flush rose in his face and he hung his head.

“ It's more money she wants, of course,” Miss Morland said. “ It's just the hope that the fear of disgrace before his pupils will make him pay her more. Mr. Patullo told *me* he gave her more than he could afford. . . . It's just blackmail.”

At the Mission Rooms Michael heard Miss Morland talking stridently to the expressionless Racie ; and the word “ blackmail ” recurred wearisomely. It wounded Michael that Patullo had not yet confided in him about this matter.

“ She's pretending now she was treated badly about little Harry,” Miss Morland said. “ She never loved him : why, Racie, he was the last of five and nothing but her neglect killed all of them——”

Racie gave her a side-glance.

“ How do you know ? ” he asked : but Miss Morland went on, loud, virulent.

“ I know all about their affairs : Mr. Patullo has always confided in me : you know what a friendship there's been between us. I feel so *safe* in a friendship of that sort—there's such a difference in our ages——” Racie's lips just tightened cynically : his opinion was

that Miss Morland was just now looking nearly as old as Patullo, and he felt that she was despicable for this. "He's always been so good to me with his advice and sympathy—not that I've ever been in a position to need it," Miss Morland babbled. "My life's been such a bright one so far. Still, he's been like a father to me. . . ."

Racie, skilfully sidling along the room, managed to shed Miss Morland on to a bench beside Michael. She went on with hardly a pause :

"Upon my word, I think marriage is an awfully wretched thing, don't you ? I *wouldn't* give up my freedom : I feel sorry for girls when I hear they're going to be married, and I'm sorrier still for men tied to *awful* women like that. No sympathy ever between them, nothing in common. . . ."

Michael had often heard Miss Morland express these views on marriage : he smiled gently, chaffing her a little, half listening while she ran on in her broken inconsequent way, passionately, regarded by round eyes and overheard by outraged ears. The mission people, shawled and capped, were crowding into the bright bare room.

"I wonder if Dillie Trathbye and Alick Cowie are happy," Miss Morland's voice came. . . . "I always suspected she married him to get away from home."

Racie and another man were moving the piano to make room for the dance with which the evening was to open. Michael was aware of the pianist, a plump girl in white, removing a phenomenal number of silver bangles.

"To get away . . . ?" he asked.

"Oh, she was wretched at home !" Miss Morland

vociferated. "Awfully unhappy. Her aunt's bed-ridden now, they say; but she was always a fearful old person. She led Dillie such a life, she often used to run up to my digs in tears. The mother was something of a Tartar too. Alick Cowie's often confided in me about it: he said he was glad to get Dillie out of the house, away from them all. . . . But it never seemed to strike the poor boy she was marrying him *just* to get away."

"Get away from what?"

"Why, the Trathbys are miserably poor," Grace said, scornful. "Didn't you notice? I was often ashamed to go out with Dillie—holes in her boots, and all that sort of thing, and cheap rags on her. I must say my friends are rather a smartly dressed lot. . . I can always tell a girl who comes out of a nice house."

"What was wrong? . . . Her mother was very fond of her. . . ." Michael faltered.

"Her mother hated her," Miss Morland clashed out. "Every one noticed it."

Racie had drawn nearer, and Michael was aware of his dark figure, the regular motion of his arm, and the white spray of the powdered wax he was scattering on the floor. The pianist had set her cylinder of bangles on the top of the piano, where they glinted. The gaslights swayed in the gusts from the continuous opening and closing of the door, and the green draperies on the platforms and windows softly bellied out and subsided. Michael nodded to Mrs. Quinn, smiling in a group of friends: but the power to love these people, the power to be interested in them, was suddenly gone. It was as if an edifice which he had built up patiently, with labour and sorrow and prayer,

had felt the blows of a fierce wind and had fallen, huddling. His will had taken hold of his own life, resolved to guide and use it : but the wind !—the wind blew where it listed, and no man could stay its breath.

It was not conscious pain that he felt : it was an impulse so overwhelming that he did not know whether it could be likened to gladness or to grief. He was saying to himself that he must see Drusilla and know the truth. The idea of sitting through the long programme of efforts to “bring people together” did not present itself to him as intolerable and impertinent : he simply ignored it.

Racie was furtively glancing at his friend. He knew what that silly old thing had been saying to Michael. Why, she never mentioned an engaged or married couple without doubting the purity of their motives, the compatibility of their temperaments. . . . But how could one make Michael Quentin see that ?

“Miss Morland—I think every one’s ready for the dance,” Racie said, his habitual dryness almost kindling into unpleasantness. He resentfully watched her slouching into the middle of the floor, clapping her hands and bawling out : “Now, good people !” She taught the steps awkwardly and uncertainly, with blunderings, with an amateur’s destructive criticism. What an amateur she was in everything !—in life itself ! Yet Michael Quentin’s judgment—

“No wonder the School Board won’t give her a berth,” Racie murmured. “All private schools she teaches in—um ? Mick, if you want the thing to go, you ought to get another instructor. You could keep her as an assistant to save her feelings.”

Michael looked at him : it was disturbing to Racie

to realise that the words had not impressed his friend's consciousness.

"Where are you going?" Racie asked with something of fierceness.

"Out of this," Michael answered with his simple truthfulness. "I must get thinking."

VI

He must see Drusilla: he must know the truth. . . . Had he not always known it? Had there not always been a deep place in his heart where, beyond the reach of reason and righteousness, unconquered, there had crouched the conviction that she did not love Cowie?

She did not love Cowie: she could not: it was a thought too incredible for complete faith even in Michael's moments of highest altruism, of humblest submission. Since there was a spark of the Divine in all men there must be one in Cowie: Michael did not deny this: all that he could assert was that he had never seen this spark—and he did not believe that Drusilla had seen it.

He had told himself, struggling with his first agonies and astonishments, that he ought to be glad that her love had fallen like a light on Alexander Cowie's life, illumining and blessing it. A nature as base and vile as Cowie's had just this paramount need of a sign so dazzling and undeniable of God's existence. He had argued with himself that love at its noblest was not an exchange affected between two equals; not even the flooding together of two lives passionately sympathetic. No: the highest love was that which he had recognised in the days when he had thought

only of the love of God ; a rapture of giving, of helping and saving ; pitiful, unrecking, eternal. He had told himself that perhaps only a wretch like Cowie could bring such a love showering down from a noble woman's heart. . . . As for himself, he had faith and hope : he could learn to climb, patiently and not unhappily, alone : he could learn to bend to give a hand to those weaker. He had never yielded to the thought that his life would be broken : it could not be even lonely with the sense that she was working by his side, seeking to bless one man's life while he blessed many.

But suppose he had been mistaken about her ? He had often made mistakes about people. Suppose this supreme love, too, had been fostered and fed by imaginings ? Suppose she had not understood or had understood only a little. . . .

Oh, God ! Had there been a moment in which she had needed his help ? Might he have saved her ? . . . It was a thing of which he was afraid to think.

" I must see her," he said to himself again. " Then I'll know. I must know." He had no reflections on what might follow, and no consciousness of the exact state of his feelings towards her. He did not feel that she was lower than he had thought, nor did he seek for justifying explanations of her action. He felt as if he were waiting, tensely, for a message, the tremendous significance of which annulled all intervening thought and held all future action dependent. He must know.

He resolved not to go down to Fauldstane. In two days there was to be a meeting of the Eire Club ; and, if he went about town, he might meet her somewhere. . . . If he did not, and if she and Cowie did not come

to the meeting of the club, he would write to them, regretting their absence and specially inviting them to attend at the next lecture. Then (he thought) he could go back to The Corner House and begin to study again in the white studio.

He went about town but he met neither Drusilla nor Cowie. He did not expect to see them at the club meeting: so he spent the afternoon of that day in writing to them, and went to the club-rooms with the letter in his pocket.

It was a warm night and Burke Place was of a blue-black darkness with here and there the long shaken reflection of a gas-lamp seeming to go quivering down into the depths of the pavement. There was a little pool in each of the concave steps and the old-fashioned rain-misted lamp, elbowing out above the doorway, made a blurred wash of golden light. . . . And suddenly, heart-breakingly, there lived again that other moist blue night of more than a year ago, with the scurr of the match, and the scent of the rose, and the sweet expectant voice calling . . . calling.

Calling for what? For the things that a woman needed most and a man could give. For a home and food and clothes and tendance in sickness? For the glory of Love and the finding of God.

Michael saw a woman standing on the highest of the steps. She closed her umbrella, and the misted golden lamp-light suffused her hair disordered under a velvet cap.

"Let me take your cloak," Michael said. She let it fall from her shoulders as their clasped hands quickly loosed. Michael stood for a moment seeing the lovely face that the faithless soul had betrayed.

VII

"Going to be nobody but werselves?" Cowie said. He had come in his shirt-sleeves into the parlour, where Drusilla sat at her writing-table. Lately Cowie had begun to wear the medical tall hat and frock-coat; and he was obliged to take care of these sombre signals of prosperity, removing the coat as soon as he came indoors. He wriggled into a trim jacket.

"Did you post-card Aggie to come over to you to-night?" Cowie asked. He had joined a local orchestra in which he led the violins, and it met for practice every Thursday.

"No. I knew she couldn't come," Drusilla said, with her pretty smile. "You needn't worry about me, Alick—thanks. . . . If I'm very lonely I can go to the Eire—this is the night for it, and Miss Morland's always asking me to come."

Cowie sat silent for a minute; then said:

"I wish you'd drop that woman. She's spoken about. . . . You'd be just as well not to invite her to your house."

"I don't invite her: she comes," Drusilla said with a laugh. "I don't like her really, Alick—and I don't think she likes me. Only she's lonely and . . ."

"I know, bless you!" Cowie said contritely. "I wisht I'd a nater like yours, Dillie."

"Don't be silly," Drusilla said. "I thought . . ."

"Poetry," Cowie said. "What did you think?"

"I thought I'd just go to this meeting of the Eire, or to the next, and tell Grace Morland, and the rest of them, I'm not going to go any more."

"Funny notion, going to tell them you're not going," Cowie chaffed. "Why shouldn't you go?" he went on argumentatively. "There's no two doubts you were in your element there; and it's a resource for you: it will keep you from missing me so much when I'm at the orchestra. It's wholesome for husband and wife to have some interests that are not quite identical. I shouldn't expect you to make yourself into a mere reflection of Alick Cowie. . . . Don't let that fellow Tunstall see you home."

"Why shouldn't he?" Drusilla asked with a little cascade of laughter. She had not spoken to Tunstall half a dozen times, but she found him useful in modifying Cowie's tendency to underrate her attractiveness to other men. Was it not a policy rather than a tendency? She was beginning to understand that Cowie's jealousy must soothe itself with denials of what showed in other men's eyes. . . . "Tunstall told Kitty Curwen at the Eire that I had grown more beautiful than ever," she said mischievously.

"Well, I'm surprised at him saying that," Cowie said, an uneasy flush in his cheek. It was one of his likeable characteristics that he responded so artlessly to attempts to annoy him.

"*Oh, Alick!*" Drusilla exclaimed. "Don't you think I'm beautiful?"

"Not in the ordinary sense," Cowie said evasively. "Of course I'd rather have your face than the face of any beauty on earth. . . . All I meant was, I shouldn't expect a fellow like Tunstall to admire you—I'd have thought he'd go in for a style more brilliant and striking than yours. Beauty is largely a question of taste. That is so. Still there is a pretty generally

accepted standard by which the Man in the Street forms his judgments."

"Mr. Chairman!" Drusilla gibed with another little cascade of laughter. "It's a wonder you don't address me as 'Mr. Chairman.'"

"I will if you like," Cowie said, smiling, as he began to read a paper. Presently he glanced across at her and saw that she was (as he thought) looking into a mirror which hung opposite to the writing-table. And he smiled again, tenderly, at her feminine weakness and his own comprehension of her thoughts.

"Never mind, Dillie dear, you'll always seem prettier than any one else to me. . . ."

"Ah?" Drusilla uttered vaguely; and he smiled again, a little annoyedly. She was pretending not to hear because he had made her angry. She was very vain and sensitive to his criticisms.

Drusilla was thinking as she sat at the writing-table. It was a fortnight since that evening on which she had met Michael on the steps of the Eire Club rooms. She had not meant to go again . . . it might be wise, however, to go with Miss Morland to-night and to make it plain that she was leaving the club. Alick's orchestra was a sufficient explanation—people expected married couples to behave in a stupid way. . . .

There were only lectures and the reading of manuscripts at the Eire; it was improving: the worst obscurantists were leaving it. Alick could not go to it now on account of his orchestra: he was eager, since their marriage, that they should join a church; and his energies would overflow into the various tributary societies. . . . Well, there was no harm in acknowledging that Alick had never understood the aims of the Eire Club. He had said himself just now

that it was right for husbands and wives to recognise differences in their tastes.

Only lectures and the reading of manuscripts : practically no social intercourse. Tunstall had seen her home the last night, and would probably do so again. Hardly the touching of hands, hardly the exchange of a glance ! She was a married woman ; and she was Irish—though her husband wanted to forget this—and in sympathy with the objects of the club. Why should not her intellectual life receive the stimulus of the club meetings ?

She had better not go. It would not be—safe.

It was a terrible word to say to oneself : it implied a terrible possibility. She was asleep but she might wake, and already her sleep was overshadowed by the terror of that awakening.

Suppose that one of those women who had sold themselves and were living in sin—the sort of woman from whom Cowie protected her—suppose that such a woman woke up and knew her life and could not drug herself again into drowsiness ? It would make a good subject for a tragedy.

She wondered that she should have this thing in her thoughts while, exteriorly, everything looked so ordinary. She sat at the fumed oak writing-table which had been the wedding gift of the Eire Club : she wore a dress which was a mixture of old rose and grey, and on her wrist shone a gold bracelet which Cowie had given her. Alick himself by the fire lay back in an arm-chair which was a wedding-gift ; and his slippered feet were gently kicking the brass and gun-metal coal-box, also a wedding-gift. Between Drusilla and her husband the tea-table stood : Cowie liked a “sitting-down tea” and the table was daintily crowded

with cakes and breads and preserves, with wedding-gift electro-plate, silver, and linen, and with a hair-raising white silk tea-cosy, ribbon-worked by Cowie's aunt in the Hebrides. . . . The china cupboard was close at hand, with its supply of bridal cups and saucers, for the bright little house was subject to many callers.

They had had a honeymoon in the south of England, first in lodgings in a red cottage covered with yellow roses, then in a big white boarding-house staring at the sands, then in London with Cowie's cousins. All the time, and since their coming home, there had been an amazing plenty of money. As many stamps as Drusilla wanted came quietly from Cowie's pocket : her own new purse was a strange sight, with its twinkle of silver and gold : tradesmen came to her door and she bought so many meats and vegetables and cakes that it was surprising at the end of the week to find that she had kept well within the sum allotted to her by Cowie, and to hear his loving praises of her management. He would hardly allow her to spend her own pocket-money : if she went shopping he insisted on paying her back for this or that little article. " I ought to have got it for you before," he always said. It seemed to her that they were always going to theatres, or picture-palaces, or to " parties " at the houses of Cowie's friends. Their own house, cared for by a maid who seemed superfluous to Drusilla, was in a dazzling state of cleanliness, a fairy-tale-like readiness at all hours for the reception of visitors.

" It doesn't seem real," Drusilla said to Essie. " It's all like a dream." Alick certainly pressed the claims of his relatives more urgently than those of hers : but, with his kindly decency, he always welcomed the Trathbys. It was disappointing to

Drusilla that the new house was not so useful to them as she had hoped that it would be: they showed a disposition to resent the new furniture and dresses, the troops of Cowies and Cowies' friends. "I don't go where I'm not wanted," Aunt Caroline said.

A bright little flat with a handsome young couple in it! The scenery of the dream was commonplace, and so perhaps were the incidents. In the mornings, when Drusilla was helping the maid, the flat was often full of sunshine; and she used to pause at her open windows full of greenery to listen to the Frenchwoman who lived above singing to her baby. Drusilla did a good deal of dressmaking and was having music lessons; and these, with the preparing of dinner, filled the morning hours and often the greater part of the afternoon. But she went out regularly, for Cowie was exigent about her health. In all her comings and goings, her uprisings and down-lyings, she was lapped about with his love and care, his praises and censures, his restrictions and jealousies. . . . How could the dream be called an ugly one?

Only the awakening had the power of giving this dream a hideous significance. And since she had seen Michael Quentin on the steps of the Eire Club rooms she had known that there was a danger that she might awake. . . . The knowledge had already troubled her dreaming, which showed broken, fantastic, faintly coloured.

"Well, I'll go to-night," Drusilla said, rising. "But what am I to do if Tunstall insists?"

She rang for tea. It was one of the interesting things in the dream that she could ring to summon a maid; and another was that, by raising or lowering a pin, she could flood her rooms with light or darkness.

VIII

Cowie's jealousy troubled him so much during the orchestra practice that at half-past nine he rose, resolved that he would go to the Eire and escort Drusilla home.

"Going, Alick?" the conductor said in disgust. "Augh, that's no a way to do! A nice show we'll make on the night of wer concert if this is all the enthusiasm we can get up among us——"

"Oh, cheese it!" Cowie said, and smiled at the appreciative laughter of the other members. "You know that nobody can be more depended on than I to do my best for the band," he added solemnly. "If regularity of attendance is any criterion, I may claim, I believe, to be as enthusiastic as any one here. . . . But I've an engagement."

"Don't you know the poor chap's married?" the French horn said. The young men in the orchestra were mostly friends of Cowie, had stood chatting at street corners with him, been his companions at football matches and in long country walks on Sundays.

"Ay—we must make allowances," the conductor said; and Cowie, laughing and blushing, ran downstairs, a little shamefaced at his own uneasiness. He allowed to himself that he was leaving early partly because he had ruffled Dillie a little at tea time. Of course he had been sincere in what he had said about her beauty! She was ridiculously—adorably—vain; and it was absurd to consider herself fair in all men's eyes.

The town was crowded, the cars singularly unsuitable. When Cowie escaped from out of the bright

tangle of lights and noises into the dimness of Burke Place, he found that the meeting was over. The figures of the black-dressed woman and her stout companion were visible to him, on the far side of the place, and their voices came to him :

“ . . . Fed up wi’ that. Agh, folks want something a bit livelier . . . ask Mr. Tunstall to propose to the committee they should get Dr. Cowie to give us a paper.”

“ On ‘ Humour ’ ? Oh, the *very* thing . . . nothing but empty benches if *yon’s* to go on.”

“ Isn’t it *awful* about Patullo ? . . . Agh, anybody but *him* ’ud ’ave known. You can’t . . . ”

“ Cure it.” Cowie fancied rather than heard the last words as the women rounded a corner. He was keenly interested in local gossip and regretted that he was not with the women to question them about Patullo. So the old fellow was back at his old games ! But Cowie’s grimness was touched by a compassion that would not have lighted it a few months ago. He felt subconsciously sorry for every one who was not young and healthy and good-looking and newly married to Drusilla.

There was a quick light step on the pavement behind him.

“ Good evening, Dr. Cowie,” Michael Quentin said with that recently acquired calmness of his.

Cowie greeted him with an eagerness which owed something to that same subconscious sense of his own unequalled good fortune. He felt faintly sorry for Michael and faintly ashamed of his own little triumphs at the Eire.

“ Glad to see you, Mr. Quentin. How’s the club getting on ? ”

Michael would have passed away from him after a few questions and answers and a few words of courteous congratulation, but Cowie kept by his side.

"I came up to look for my wife, but I'm afraid I've missed her."

Michael explained that he did not know exactly when Drusilla left the rooms, nor with whom: they debouched into the clangour and the web of lights of a thoroughfare; and suddenly Racie Moore ran past them.

"Accident," Racie panted. "Car ran off and into another."

"Any one hurt?" Michael asked.

"Lady killed, they say," Racie said, and ran on.

"These newspapers dehumanise people . . ."

Michael was beginning: he stopped at the sight of Cowie's white face.

"I heard some one say just now it was a car going south," Cowie said, and began to walk hurriedly.

Michael had no such fear: rather, he was convinced that, if any accident happened to Drusilla, he would at once know of it. He believed this in spite of the proofs that he had had that silence and distance could build up lying barriers between them—that they were as piteously at the mercy of material things as were the rest of mankind. He believed it as lovers believe with a certainty of knowledge that flouts experience and ignores reason.

Cowie began to run, his hands in the pockets of his overcoat, his bowler hat on the back of his head. Michael, running too, was thinking Cowie's thoughts and sharing his feelings. One of his exalted moods had come to Michael: he had risen beyond the limits

of his own personality and that of his companion : he had attained to that perfect sympathetic insight for which he had prayed. Just now Alexander Cowie's love and anxiety were engrossing things, demanding the attention of God and man.

" I wasn't quite kind to her this afternoon," Cowie confessed, as if to propitiate fate.

When they reached the scene of the accident they saw that the long procession of lighted and coloured cars was slowly moving on. They were told that one elderly lady had been killed and two young ladies, hurt, had been carried to the Royal Infirmary. Racie Moore, about to dash off to the office of *The Mercury*, stopped with reassuring descriptions of the injured.

" Then *where* is she ? " Cowie said with a contentious air.

" Better take a southern car home and see," Racie suggested, with his nearest approach to a laugh.

Michael went with Cowie to the new tenement in the muddy new road. They entered the close, prettily tiled with new " art " tiles, heliotrope and green ; brightly lighted with an electric lamp.

" Why, there she is ! " Cowie exclaimed, darting in.

Drusilla in her violet costume, her black velvet cap, muff, and stole, stood at the door : she looked tired and cold.

" Tunstall took me and the Curwens home in his motor," she explained. " I've just got back. . . . You don't mind, do you ? "

Mind ! Cowie must clasp her tightly for a moment.

" Quentin's there," he said apologetically. " I thought you were in that accident." . . .

He felt Drusilla tear herself from his arms.

"Let me go," she said with a hushed violence. For the moment he felt resentment, then he exulted in her delicacy.

Michael had gone to the opening of the close, and Cowie followed him and asked him to come in.

"I—I will," Michael said after a long pause. Cowie was amused by the hesitation, the stammer, the awkwardness. Queer chap . . . poor chap! Cowie felt rather sorry for Michael Quentin. . . .

Michael entered the little parlour, bright with electric light and wedding-gifts, and sat down to supper at Cowie's table.

IX

From The Corner House, through the trees in their November bareness, the sea could be seen: sunlit, riotous, foaming, peacock-blue streaked with viridian green, against a curving strip of blond sand. The range of dimpled hills inland beyond Fauldstane were capped with blue-white snow; and their slopes, of the golden-green of withered grass, glistened in the sunshine.

Michael, who had been walking about since early in the morning, came into the house at noon. The rooms glowed with colour and light and in the orange-and-white dining-room the table was set. Michael said that he did not want luncheon till one; and Mattie, contemptuous, replaced the frugal dishes in the oven.

"Cookannousekeeper here doesn't mean much but just housekeeper," Mattie said. "There's no support in these rubbish he eats now. I wonder it doesn't

make him hungry to smell the good butcher-meat cooking for us. . . . But you can't smell anything in this house, it's built such a funny way. The smells don't seem to hang in it the way they ought."

"He *looks* all right," the housemaid said, glancing up from a "Pansy Novel." "And he eats all right. He's thin, but he's such a nice fresh colour."

"Well, anybody 'ud have a colour rushing about in that wind all day," Mattie said. . . . "It's a kind of emptiness there's in his life, I'm thinking. My, any young man with his money might do such a lot of good on the committees of societies for helping folks."

"It's a wonder he doesn't get married," the housemaid said thoughtfully. . . . "Everybody wouldn't please him, I suppose . . . and he'll not be able to get quit of the thought of the dead young lady. Poor soul! There he is going up the stairs now."

"It's all rubbish you're thinking about the young lady," Mattie said, with a laugh. "You're that sentimental. He just goes in there to read. My, it would be the making of him if he'd the gumption to fall in love with a woman."

The sun was right above in a hollow inlaid with masses of gold-white clouds; and the interior of the white studio, with no curtains dropped within its dome of glass, was of an almost intolerable radiance. The white walls, the white floor and furniture seemed to quiver: a little lump of clay from a boot, a fallen petal, would have been weighed upon by the full load of that cataract of light falling sheer from the height of heaven and flooding the level of the floor. There was not a stray flower-petal, not a morsel of clay, not a cylinder of dust: the radiance, hungry for a break in the colourlessness, seized on the crimsons

and carmines and pinks of the mass of roses on the white and silver inlaid table : and searched out every detail of the rood with its black cross and the flaccid figure slung upon it.

So, in the awful brightness, Michael's tortured heart lay before God ; and his lips tried to say as those divine lips had said : " Not my will be done—but God's."

This archetype of man had suffered for the sake of his fellow-men. Recognising that life is a perpetual strife in which each man must be the conqueror or the conquered he had renounced the baseness of success. His image hung there proud, triumphant, scornful, an eternal reality. His great struggle was being repeated on a lesser scale in the life of every human being.

To suffer—or to let another man suffer ? . . . Michael could no longer consider Cowie superficially as a bounder, a Glasgow dandy, full of jests, of tags, of popular songs, of football enthusiasm. It was not possible even to think of Cowie as the phantom champion of all the smoke-like shapes of materialism as opposed to the shining verities of faith. The struggle between him and Cowie was no longer the conflict of ideas : it was no longer a wide, vaguely seen battle of mustering legions and flaunting banners. . . . The lists must be narrow now : the fight must be fierce : the two combatants, alone, must meet eye to eye, for life or for death. It was the old struggle between two men for a woman's love.

Strange how it sucked in and held all the meanings of all things past and hereafter to come. All of a man's strength, all of his knowledge, all of his loves, all of his faith ! Everything that a man knew of God

seemed hardly enough to help him now ; everything of patience that the saints had won for their fellows by batterings at the doors of heaven ; everything of wisdom for which students had watched and waited.

“ Centripetal ! ” Michael said to himself and smiled.

Cowie loved her ; and, while it still seemed incredible to him that she should love Cowie, in the full sense, Michael could see now that Cowie was not unworthy of being loved. His soul was at a much lower stage of development : hers must always stoop to its unconscious aspirations : but for this very reason was she not precious to Cowie ? He needed her, he himself did not know how much, nor why. In this ministry her own soul might reach its highest development : she might come to love her husband with a great love, tender, such as a mother feels for a child, or a human for an animal. . . . And she was bound to Cowie by promises spoken in God’s name. She had taken his happy, contented, unaspiring life into her hands and warmed it and made it tremble, so that it could never again be quite untroubled. She had no right to lay it down : the very things that Cowie lacked, his unlikenesses to her, were the fibres of his claim upon her. . . .

Did she love Michael ? Oh, yes—yes ! God knew she did even if she did not know it herself. But the whiteness of love must not be fouled by cruelty to another man. Let her love stay hidden in the holy place of her innermost heart : let God know it and bless it : let it wait till the barriers of sense were down and their two souls met, in the full light, on a higher plane—their two real selves who belonged to each other. Here on the physical plane, she was weak : she was blinded, enfeebled, weighed upon by material

things. She had yielded, he did not know why; perhaps to a false standard of duty to her family, perhaps to a call to her senses. She had yielded, it did not matter how nor why. The soul that he loved was eternal and unyielding: what did her body matter to him? . . .

Michael dropped on his knees, burying his face in the roses, vivid, wet, with here and there specklings of wet clay. . . . The scent of her hair, the gleams and glooms in it, the colour of her cheeks flooding into the whiteness of her temples, the warm half-hidden neck, the bright mouth!

He prayed that he might be given strength to endure anything rather than to hurt a fellow-man; and that the woman whom he loved might be kept from sin. He was afraid of himself. . . .

With God all things were possible. . . .

“He’s come down,” Mattie said; “and he says he’ll have a cup of tea. I’m glad he’s given in, for he’s given up tea ever since he came home. He’s looking tired. You can’t live without tea. There’s no sense in folks setting themselves things to do that they know are impossible.”

CHAPTER VII

THE ROSE-COLOURED ROOM

I

ON an evening near the beginning of February, Michael and Drusilla crossed Burke Place in a flutter of fine snow. The flakes, enlarging, melted on their warm faces and congregated in white smears on their unsheltered heads and shoulders. An empty taxi-cab purred past them.

"Let's—excuse me," Michael uttered. Characteristically he had let the cab run past before he hailed it. It pulled up and the driver leaned down, his coat-collar edge pressing into his red cheek.

"Fifteen Ainslie Street, please," Michael said.

The flakes came no longer in a flutter, but in a whirl; and over the city there was that hush that snow weather brings.

"Snow always makes you feel very young, doesn't it?" Drusilla said. "It always brings me back to Hans Andersen—Kay and Gerda, you know, and the roses, and the Snow Queen coming on her sled. It's the most wonderful wintry thing."

"Yes," Michael said. "Fairy-tales are always so awfully true. That's why I wonder that people can be bothered reading other things."

Cowie was ashamed of Drusilla if she read fairy and ghost stories: he resented it as an affectation of childishness unbecoming in a fine intelligent married woman.

"I *knew* you were fond of it," Drusilla said to

Michael. "It's the loveliest thing. And the end . . ."

Suddenly Michael put his arm round her. They sat, close together, warm, in a certain safe happiness.

The cab crossed Jamaica Bridge and they saw, dimly, on their left, lights spangling the river, the long indigo mass of Carlton Place and the delicate spire of Gorbals Church. They thought of the bridge and the wharves in the day-time with the facing crowds struggling northwards and southwards, with the overloaded horses struggling up the paved slopes from the piers. . . . Night and the snow had taken it all and made it beautiful: as Love had taken all the world. Even the tenements were looming blue-black palaces with tinsel windows and walls that mounted into mystery. The electric cars rushed by, coloured, radiant, triumphant, humming the burden to a great song. They were alive in a fairy-tale which ignored painful standards of right and wrong.

"I'm glad it's a taxi-cab," Drusilla said.

"Yes," Michael said. "It can't be cruel to keep the electricity out late." He laughed his high-pitched gleeful laugh. "I always use taxis," he went on, grave. "I'd be glad to see no horses in the streets . . . and fewer people—far fewer; and all of them handsome and straight with clear skins and well-shaped heads."

"People must be meant to be like that," Drusilla said. "Everything must be meant to be all right. They must be meant to be happy—not to bother about being good."

They passed a place where road-menders were at work and the interior of the carriage was lit by the golden flare of naphtha torch-lights spouting from

their tall posts. Drusilla's face showed, paled a little, the cheeks slightly hollowed and the eyes widened by the stress of emotion. She looked as she had looked that day in the park—childish, touchingly sensitive and responsive, expectant. Michael had compared her then to a rose-embowered princess hearing, without certainty, beyond the confines of her garden, the first bugle-call. . . .

As the cab ran again into duskiness, Michael bent more nearly over her and kissed her temple. She quickly raised her face and her lips answered his fervently.

She had awakened. But the fear of awakening had been a madness, one of the mockeries of broken and evil dreams. Love was a great peace: it came bringing the irresponsibility of a saint who has been lifted into ecstasy, of a child knowing neither good nor evil. Marriage had made her feel horribly old: but Love flung aside the solemn frivolities of customs and duties and romped rapturously with the eternal young soul within. She felt as if the struggle were over: nothing else mattered: there were no doubts, no questions, no marvellings. She knew that Love transcended all laws.

"When will I see you again?" Michael said, smiling, at the door in Ainslie Street.

"I'll come next night," Drusilla said, and went in. She realised that she had not confessed anything, had not explained anything: nothing seemed to demand confession or explanation. The only thing that mattered was to sit beside Michael and to feel his lips meet hers. Eternity could give nothing better, nothing more near to the still glory that was the heart of heaven.

II

She had gone to all the meetings of the Eire Club since October. She had not a clear recollection of how Tunstall had stopped seeing her home and Michael had taken his place.

In both of their hearts now all the life converged towards those few hours ; especially towards that night hour of home-coming. Michael did not know how to be furtive : he would have said to himself wildly that there was nothing to cause scandal. He loved Drusilla and she loved him ; purely, patiently, steadfastly : they were not going to do any wrong to themselves or to Cowie. . . . Sometimes, in their eagerness, they left the club early, so that they might have a longer time together : sometimes, on reaching Ainslie Street, they walked away past Cowie's house. A cold supper was always set on Thursday nights and Alick, if he came in before Drusilla, would be quite comfortable. . . .

Michael was determined not to wrong Cowie. He knew that he loved Drusilla and that she loved him : they would love each other always. . . . Once or twice, suddenly remembering the theory that the soul's love can exist without physical expression, Michael had been about to part from her without kissing her. But she clung to him, lifting her face. . . . That made it difficult. Impossible, in fact.

Everything about her now made it difficult—made it impossible ! There was wonderfully little speech, or need of speech, between them ; but she had told him, in fragments, truths about her life, making him groan and curse his own blindness. She tried to be very honest.

“ I wanted things too—that was a reason. You

can't know how much I wanted things . . . I hate anything ugly. At home it was not possible to keep oneself really *nice*. . . . Men like you care more about ideas: they don't know how much women want *things*." Her voice sank shamefully. All these astonishing piteous little wants, when he placed them side by side with her family's distresses, made her seem to him all the purer, the sweeter and nobler. He did not understand them at all as Cowie had done.

"Yes, I did!—yes, I did! I think I—cared for you nearly from the beginning. . . . It doesn't matter now," Drusilla added with quivering laughter.

In truth it did not seem to matter. When they were together it was as if time were blotted out; as if they always had been, and always would be so. Drusilla did not flee from the thought of Cowie, nor suffer much remorse at knowing that he came and went deceived. His vivid, strong personality seemed to have faded suddenly into a phantom-shape coming and going.

But Michael thought of Cowie—thought of him more and more as his own desires took more and more solid forms on the plane on which Cowie habitually moved. It was growing more and more difficult not to want to take her away from Cowie—to take her in her wrongs and tendernesses and weaknesses; to take her in her loveliness. . . .

He did want to take her. Every time now that he left her at her door there rose up the intolerable vision of the hushed house and of her and Cowie within. Her soul was his in love—oh, it was all very well to say that! He hated the sacrilege of Cowie taking in his arms the form that held the soul. The owner of the treasure had surely a right to the casket.

. . . He fought with the thought, but it sprang up again and again, like an immortal monster.

Oh, God forbid that he should destroy the life of this man who loved her ! God forbid that he should make her to share in this cruelty ! . . . The struggle had entered into the citadel of his heart and there angels fought with devils. . . . He prayed when he was alone that help might come "from the other side" ; that in some way, by the intervention of powers stronger than he, the life of Alexander Cowie might be saved from ruin. Sometimes he could attain to prayer so fierce, so importunate, so selfless, that it seemed an answer must come. . . . But when he was with Drusilla he knew that Love could do no wrong ; that Love pronounces absolution of all ills wrought to others for the sake of the beloved.

III

"There's a business meeting to-night," Racie said sourly to Michael on the third of April. "You'll have to be——"

Their eyes met and the impact struck coldly on them. Racie's look said : "You'd better not see her home : people are beginning to pass remarks." Oh, Michael knew just the kind of conventional thought that Racie would have. Always deferring to people's prejudices, yet feigning contempt of his kind.

Michael ran out into Burke Place after Drusilla. In the violet sky there was a great round moon, apricot-hued, burning, beautiful.

"I'll have to stay for that blessed business meeting—we'll not get home together. . . . Let me see you to the car."

"Isn't it a divine night?" Drusilla said reluctantly, and they walked slowly round Burke Place before they went to the car station. They smiled into each other's eyes, joyously excited in snatching these moments in the dark square, under the violet sky. Michael drew her into the shadow of a pillared doorway and kissed her: the passion in his eyes made her gaze falter.

"I love you. . . . Say you love me."

"Yes," Drusilla said. What did it matter if the red-faced woman stared at them as they went away together, or the lean woman, in her eternal and evil-smelling sables, fell on their case as her prey? To Drusilla the lean woman appeared no longer as a horror, a sordid kind of wolf, worrying, crunching, savouring. She was now only an ill-dressed woman, piteous in having entered the world in vain. For no man had loved her: she had never walked in the violet solitude with a man whom God had sent with a message to her.

With this perhaps unwarranted conviction, Drusilla was able quite gently to move the images of these two women into the background of her mind. They mattered no more than did her past miseries and mistakes and what evils might be to come. She parted from Michael at the car and he ran back, breathless, to the club-rooms.

When he entered, Racie and Tunstall were seated at the green table, and the room was filled with an atmosphere of something wrong.

"Mr. Tunstall's stayed because he helped me a good deal with the club business while you were away," Racie said in his quiet voice. "As you know, we feel it's time we went into this, though it's unpleasant."

"What's the matter?" Michael asked harshly and quickly. His thoughts had darted to Drusilla and the insolent mouth of the lean woman in sables: let them take care what they said!

But he saw that Racie and Tunstall were surprised by his white face.

"It's about the—accounts," Racie said in a nauseated tone. "Better sit down, Mick. The accounts and things. Patullo's not here of course: how many nights is it since he's been here?"

"Five now," Tunstall said. "No—four. Not since our last public lecture."

"These have been coming in," Racie said, laying his hand on a heap of papers on the table. "Some of them came to Mr. Tunstall and some to me." He lifted one of the bills and showed it to Michael. "You remember, of course, Mick, Patullo got money to pay all these? Then, there were the ads. of the lectures in the various papers. They made such a fuss about it at *The Mercury* I paid it myself."

"Of course!" Michael said, furious. "Rather than apply to me."

"You can give it back to me," Racie said, with his dry side-glance. "About the money taken for tickets for the lectures: we find none of it's been banked. There isn't a penny down to the credit of the Mission."

"You didn't say anything to Miss Morland?" Michael panted.

Racie laughed and an emotional look warmed his face.

"No, I didn't, Mick," he said. He and Tunstall exchanged a quizzical glance: it was so characteristic of Michael Quentin to consider anything but the money.

"It's a blue do," Tunstall said.

"You mean——?"

"I mean he's been robbing you—all along the line. The accounts haven't been kept at all: we'd no balance-sheet at the end of the year. . . . Never heard of such a thing. . . . But Mr. Moore said you said Mr. Patullo wasn't to be bothered. Question is, how long's it to go on? He's drinking himself to death, and you've only been helping him to commit suicide."

Tunstall's harsh voice and flushed face seemed horrible to Michael. So did the papers on the table, remorseless indelicate things with their incriminating dates and figures. It was as if Patullo himself were laid there, exposed in all his misery to a glare of light and eyes that did not pity. Michael flushed in an anguish of shame.

"We've written to him several times," Racie said with downcast eyes. "He answered once, as you know, after Clancy's lecture, saying he was coming along next night to square up. But, as you know, he didn't come. . . . What are you going to do?"

"I'll go out and see him myself," Michael said suddenly. Tunstall grinned.

"He'll get round you, Mr. Quentin."

"I'm quite willing that he should," Michael said, in an out-flash of scorn. "I'll go to-night," he said to Racie. "Give me those bills."

He crushed them together and squashed them into his pocket. Racie surmised that he would lose half of them and forget to pay the other half till they were sent again with threats.

"Never mind," Michael said ragefully. He turned

at the door : " Mr. Tunstall, I can count on you not to speak about this ? "

Tunstall had already spoken to nearly everybody in the club—but what was the good of telling Michael Quentin that ? Patullo had long ago been described by the red-faced woman as an Open Sore. Tunstall acquiesced with a grin that was half mocking, half shame-faced ; and Michael went off. Racie dashed after him and silently accompanied him to the garage.

" You'd better ask him to resign, Mick," Racie said gently, as the car started. " You can do that quite . . . pleasantly."

" Yes," Michael agreed. He was glad that he had five thousand a year : certainly it made it easier to set things right. He would settle those bills and bank a sum for the Eire Club Mission. . . . His face had whitened at Tunstall's cruel description of his attempt to help Patullo. Racie wasn't such a brute : he felt rather grateful to Racie for being different. Still, Racie *had* been rather a beast to him of late with those suspicious, resentful glances. Conventional—— !

He had neglected poor old Patullo. Yes ; it must have been this sense of his fading interest that had prevented Patullo from asking. . . . It was extraordinary how love sucked in one's energies. He had let himself lose sight of Patullo—had got tired of the job. Racie had the air of believing that he never stuck to anything, that he always gave way. A man with that bitter want of faith in one's enthusiasms must do much to keep the world from progressing. He was always trying to take the shine out of things—to blot the colour and radiance of life into a lying half-light of grey depressedness. . . . Poor old Racie ! He wasn't such a brute as the contemptuous Tunstall,

not such a brute as that lean woman kite-like in her rusty robes. Michael answered their jeering disapproval with an out-flare of scorn. After all, the money was his, he could do as he pleased. What did it matter if they found him a fool? He had a counter-charge to fling in their faces. He imagined himself saying to them :

“There’s nothing more foolish than to have no pity.”

He got down at Twenty-three Lochaber Gardens ; and as he stood, pausing at the foot of the stairs, there flashed into his mind a vision of a rose-coloured room.

A rose-coloured room such as Rollo had imagined. The picture of it came to Michael fresh and vivid as if it were flashed from Rollo’s mind into his. The walls of the room showed faintly flushed with, on the white frieze, an austere pattern of thorny branches such as diapered the harled walls of The Corner House. In the centre of the white floor there was a carpet of a soft dim hue between pink and purple. Precious vases, filled with roses, glimmered here and there, and a cluster of shaded lights hung from the ceiling—softly green as Rollo had said the ceiling of a sleeping-room ought to be. In his vision of the room he saw it at night ; and long silk curtains, embroidered with rose and brown and gold, mildly green, fell over the windows and the doorways. . . . There was no room for a crucifix in the room—let the shuddersome, dead unreal thing remain in the white phantom studio above ! There was no room for prayer nor for struggle : none for pity. Only Love was there in a divine egotism transcending all laws.

The red-cheeked Cartwright boy who lived below

the Trathbyes, came upstairs whistling and carrying a string-bag full of potatoes. He stared at Michael standing there, thinking; passed him and, turning, stared down at him from between the posts of the banisters. The boy's eyes seemed in danger of falling out; and Michael, haled out of his dream into a consciousness that was a mingling of annoyance and sarcastic amusement, went up to the top flat and rang Patullo's bell.

There followed that long pause which is one of the signs of social misery. Michael knew that he would have to wait while Patullo apologised to a pupil, or sent the charwoman out of the parlour, or put away a bottle of whisky. But he rang again, partly because he was not patient, and partly because he had been made nervous by the boy's goggling eyes.

Patullo opened the door. It was awful to bring that look of terror into a human face. . . . In his shame that this man should fear him Michael spoke in a rush, stammering :

"It's all right. . . . Mr. Patullo, may I come in ? I'm awfully sorry I've taken so long to come to look you up. . . . Perhaps you've a pupil ?"

"No ; I've no pupils now," Patullo said. He still held the door as if to keep Michael out.

"Are you alone ?" Michael asked, a new anxiety besetting him. If Patullo's wife were there——? Miss Morland had described her repeatedly as a terrible person with a shock head of hair. The interior of the house, behind Patullo's shrinking figure, seemed to yawn cave-like; and Michael felt wrathfully conscious of the cruelty and insolence of a society that hunted a poor quarry like this and dug him out of his den.

"It's all right—just if you're alone, Mr. Patullo—

it's quite all right. I can come back any time you like——"

"I'm alone," Patullo said suddenly, with a swallowing movement that sucked in his thin discoloured cheeks.

It was absurd to see a man in such a state for want of a few pounds.

Michael followed him into the stuffy flat ; murmuring pitifully :

"It's all right, Mr. Patullo. . . . I'm going to make it all right. . . ."

Five thousand a year. He felt glad of it.

IV

"Well, I'm off, old girl!" Cowie called. It was Sunday morning and he was going to church with his mother and sisters. Cowie had recently engaged two seats for himself and his wife.

"Because I think we ought to pay our way," he explained with his pioneer air, "I can't accept the *dogmas* of the Church : but I think there's a great deal to be said for the fellowship of its members. There's no two doubts it brings you into touch with people. I don't mean just in the matter of getting patients," Cowie went on, with an attractive laugh and blush. He added diffidently, with an emotional moistening of his eyes : "Mother was talking about it the other evening, Dillie, when you and Aggie were washing up in the kitchen. . . . There's a lot in what Mother says sometimes though she's not intellectual or littery. . . . She was saying it's others we've got to think of in a thing like this : she said supposing we had youngsters that went wrong and in the future

we felt like reproaching ourselves because we hadn't started them fair——”

Though she was in daily contact with Alick's view of her Drusilla could not absorb it : the most she could do was to refrain from repelling it. Each time that he left her there was the sense of retiring with her real self to resume the thoughts that his presence had interrupted. He and his hopes and interests moved on the outermost confines of her life : he could not even surmise the existence of an inner chamber to which he had no key. He loved her, he was content.

Drusilla, standing in her open bay window where boxes of blossomed daffodils thrilled in the April sunlight, heard all around her the clangour of church bells. She watered the flowers slowly, watching the drops shine in the sun ; her senses taking pleasure in the colour, in the odours of the damped clay and the yellow petals, in the bright Sunday atmosphere of the street. Between the waves of the bells' sounds she could hear the scurr of feet on the footpaths, the squawking of a gramophone in one of the neighbouring flats, and the intense “ Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick ” of a motor-cycle round the corner.

The bells stopped. The young Frenchwoman from the flat above came downstairs, issued from the close wheeling a bassinet. She looked up at Drusilla, waving her hand, crying out that she and the baby were going to spend the sunny morning in the park. She wore a new hat that was a mass of pale and dark violets.

“ Are you not come wit us ? ”

“ No,” Drusilla called, smiling. “ I stayed in to get Alick's dinner.”

But she still lingered, idle, in the bay-window.

Many mothers and fathers, wheeling baby-carriages, came from closes all along the street ; for the place was full of young couples. Persons with dogs, too, began to walk about in the pleasant stillness, and little boys and girls with toy horses and motors.

Drusilla, moving a little into the room, saw herself reflected, sun-bathed, in a mirror—her lovely hair, her white neck and blue Magyar robe inset with Oriental embroidery. She thought of her overall hanging on the kitchen door, and of the red Sunday joint not yet in the oven.

She put her hand to the bosom of her dress. Michael Quentin's letter was in there, lying warm and deeply hidden.

Michael had written it from The Corner House. He had gone down to Ayrshire, light-hearted, on the morning following his comforting interview with old Patullo.

She was afraid. . . . To go with Michael would be like Death—a great splendour but a great terror. It would mean a rending and snapping of all her earthly ties ; and while the spirit found the going easy the flesh felt shame and fear. She must fling away all her respect for custom, for righteousness, and respectability : she must flout the vows that she had taken at her wedding : she must have done with all her friendships : she must give hostages to the envious ; must fulfil the grievous prophecies of her mother and Aunt Caroline that her lack of restraint (where men were concerned) would bring disgrace on them all. She must renounce the hope of finding lovers for Essie and Kathleen : she must creep for ever out of the fond motherly arms of Mrs. Cowie, out of Aggie's great hugging hold. . . . She must shatter

Alick's life into a thousand amazements and disgraces. . . . He did not ask much : it was so easy to content him with imitations.

If Michael—or this force which had absorbed both her and Michael—would only *take* her—take her, overwhelmed, helpless, blind, deaf, unreasoning, unblamed ! It was outrageous, it was inquisitorial, it was ludicrous, that she and he should have their hearts swept through by this flaming whirlwind while their brains were left clear for thought and their feet and hands obedient to their wills. . . . Or if her dilemma spelt simply this : on the one side her married life, on the other side Michael Quentin, each eternally to be lost or won. Ah, how easy it would be *then* to decide ! But (her timidity argued) to keep her fair name and to do no wrong to her husband, did not mean to lose Michael Quentin. He was hers. Let them wait—what matter how long Death was of coming ? She knew well that she did not want to die—that life hardly seemed sorrowful. The maidenly romantic part of her—left unsatisfied by Cowie's eagerness to matronise her—turned not unwillingly to a future of snatched meetings and subtle communings. . . .

The door bell rang—a pneumatic bell with a startling “birrrr !” The servant was at church and Drusilla went to the door, expecting a mistaken milk-boy.

Miss Morland was at the door.

“Can I come in ? . . . Have you heard ?”

“No : what's wrong ?” Drusilla said. “Come in.”

They went into the parlour and Miss Morland looked round it as her habit was on entering a room. Drusilla ran into the kitchen to put the meat into the gas-oven, then returned, pink-cheeked in her blue robe.

"Mr. Patullo's dead," Grace said. She looked so ghastly that Drusilla did not attempt to exclaim or pity: she waited for what was to come, watching Grace undo her black bearskin stole, which she had evidently put on hurriedly over a meagre stained house-frock.

"Ah . . . I thought you might know. Your mother heard it."

"Heard——?"

"The shot," Grace said. "He shot himself."

"Oh . . . Grace! The *poor* man . . ."

Grace looked with a kind of pleased interest at Drusilla's tears: there was expressed in the glance something of a dramatic artist's gratitude to a comprehending house.

"I don't know how much you know," Grace said. "I wonder if you guessed anything. . . . Nobody did, I think. I'm not the kind of person people talk about, and then I was so popular at the Eire. . . . And of course it seemed unlikely, he was so much older. . . . It's very nice in here, but it's jolly cold."

Drusilla shut the windows. Grace was bending over the fire, newly lit and crackling. The sunlight, touching her sideways, showed the lined flaccid face, the blighted hair on her temples.

"I loved him," Grace said desperately. . . . "There was never anything wrong between us. . . . When I went to him in the old days I knew I should love him. There was always a strong sympathy between us: we had such a lot of things in common. It was quite a psychic thing from the first. . . . I saw from the first he was wretched with that woman: she was of quite a different class, uneducated and all that, you know—used to come into the room in a petticoat

or with a lump of something in her mouth, you know. . . . She was most frightfully jealous."

"Of you?"

"Oh, my dear, yes," Miss Morland said, complacent. She fell into a muse, staring in front of her with her fine eyes, blank like the eyes of a sick animal. . . . "I declare it's so strange to think of him lying dead there. Your mother heard the shot."

"I know—you said that. Why did he——?"

"Oh, he left such a pathetic letter: so awfully pathetic. . . . Mrs. Ross—that's his charwoman—came to look for me this morning: she knew we were such friends. She went in to get his breakfast for him as usual . . . and she found him . . . lying over the table with the pistol in his poor hand."

"Oh—Grace! . . . " Drusilla said, sobbing.

"He'd left a letter for Mick Quentin," Grace said. "I took it round to Mick's lodgings but he wasn't there—he's in Ayrshire. I opened the letter—I know Mick won't mind, he and I are such chums. See, here it is."

Drusilla, shudderingly, saw that a corner of the envelope was dimpled where a drop of Patullo's blood had fallen on it.

"Oh, I can't look at it—I don't want to read it—I don't think I should."

"Of course you're not so intimate with Mick," Miss Morland said absently, and again sat gazing in front of her. . . . "Mr. Patullo had got the club money all wrong, and it couldn't be concealed any longer. Mick had gone to him some days before and been nice to him—said he'd hush it all up and all that sort of thing, you know. . . . Mr. Patullo says in the letter he could have borne being imprisoned, but he

couldn't bear Mick finding it out and being so kind to him. He said the shame of having failed after what Mick had done for him was simply eating into him; and he brooded over it and brooded over it and . . . "

"He was awfully sensitive," Drusilla said pitifully.

"Rather! Why, my dear child, *you* don't know," Grace said with a kind of anger. "Nobody but I knows what that man has had to suffer. . . . That woman was simply *awful*. . . . You know she killed all his children—well, it's the same thing, she let them die of neglect. He'd have been a most *devoted* father if he'd had a chance. . . . Why, she followed him about from place to place and disgraced him before people. . . . I say, did you ever see her?"

"Of course not," Drusilla said. "Don't talk about her. . . . Tell me about you and him. I want to know."

"We never did anything wrong," Miss Morland said. "I waited. I don't pretend I didn't hope she would die—she was lower than a beast. Why shouldn't I wish it?" Grace's voice coarsened as Drusilla had noticed it did when expressive of strong emotion: she seemed suddenly to shake herself free of reserves and pretences: her speech, her gestures, and appearance were those of a woman of the people, and with her sincerity came a sort of grandeur. She had risen and stood now erect, now bending with her arms on the back of a chair; not shedding tears, but every now and then wiping her lips with a crumpled handkerchief. The very dishevelment of her dress, the neglected greyed hair, contributed curiously to giving her a sort of majesty. Daintinesses would have been as much out of place on her as on a big-framed

statue moulded by a realistic artist to express plebeian sorrow. Drusilla, listening in a vivid excitement to the broken misery-weighted fragments of her talk, visualised the scenes of the drama. She saw Miss Morland's bedroom in the big respectable west-end house, dark even on such a sunny morning; saw the streets, almost empty, through which Grace hurried with the charwoman; saw Patullo's parlour and felt its heavy sour odours of tobacco, of whisky, of meals cooked greasily by Mrs. Ross in the kitchen across the tiny hall; saw the hotly red walls, the red-brown woodwork, the jostling, huddling wreckage of the big pieces of furniture, their mahogany or walnut surfaces sticky and dull, pitted and scratched. She saw the crimson-tiled hearth spattered with last night's ashes; and at the table littered with papers, Patullo with his face down and the pistol in his piteous small hand; dead of shame because another man had been kind to him.

"Oh, *poor* man!" Drusilla sobbed. "Oh, *poor* Grace . . . you poor thing."

"I wish we hadn't waited," Grace said. "He always kept on saying we must wait. . . . It was all very well for him to say that: he never wanted me so much as I did him. I used to be glad I loved him more—I'm not so sure now. . . . I wonder how it could have been worse for either of us than things as they've been. I dare say people have thought I'd done wrong: I'm sure they have at the club: they don't like me . . . and, do you know, Drusilla, I was in a family as nursery-governess at first and they wouldn't keep me? I'm sure now it was that. . . . I wonder what good I got by doing nothing wrong. Why, I mayn't even go and look at his body again

if that creature comes and chooses to deny me the house. . . . And look what my life's been, Dillie."

"Oh . . . " Drusilla was crouched on the fender-stool, her face hidden.

"It's broken me all up. . . . It's made me so frightfully old. . . . You don't know what it means, child, to be all alone all your life—not to have a single person you can speak to . . . and to see your life, and your youth, and any looks and spirits you had, all going away from you. . . . I cut myself off from my own people chiefly on his account, you know : I didn't want him to know exactly what their social position was : I was afraid he might come to be ashamed of me—if that creature died and we got married, you know. She had something wrong with her, you know ; and that with her habits . . . Isn't it *extraordinary* to think that she's alive and he's dead ? She was younger, of course, but no one would ever have known that. . . . Of course I was young when I did that : I didn't know how the thing was going to turn out. . . . Then, when I tried to see something of my people again, later, I found they shrank from me. It was like that everywhere. All the societies and classes and things I joined I seemed to get left. The girls seemed all to get into cliques and conspired to leave me out. . . . Do you know, you're the only girl I know who seemed to want to keep on seeing me ? . . . If I'd lost my character I don't see how I could have been ostracised more. Even if a woman were to be damned at once for doing that, how's it worse than being damned by degrees ? To go on hungering and hungering. . . . He'd got tired of me himself."

Miss Morland rose, glancing at Drusilla's wedding-gift clock in its Connemara marble case.

"I say, I must be going. . . . I say, when does your husband come in? . . . Oh yes, it's Sunday of course. I'm going back to him. He looks so awfully peaceful, Dillie: you can see what an awfully delicate, refined sort of face he had before. . . . Oh, I hope that creature won't have got the news and come to the house!" Yet there was a strain of longing in Grace's voice, a horrible harridan-like desire to meet her enemy over the body of the man who had been dear to them both.

"Your mother was very kind," Grace said, lifting the heavy bearskin stole. "She asked me to come in, and wanted to make me a cup of tea."

"Mother's always kind to people in trouble," Drusilla said proudly. "Do go in when you go back—you'll be worn out, you poor thing." She came close to Grace, arranging the fur on her shoulders, clasping it at her neck; then drew down the woman's head, kissing and stroking her face. The muscles of Grace's mouth worked, but the exhausted heart could not overflow in a great flood of emotion: its energies had for too long been drained away in dribblets.

Love, with its fairy-like simplicity, showed Grace Morland to Drusilla as an unhappy woman who had entered a room and seen the man she loved lying dead. That was really why Drusilla pitied her and held her warmly and kissed her. The man was dead, and the poor woman had never given nor received happiness. To come into a room and find the man you loved lying dead and to know that you had not made him happy . . .

Drusilla moved to the window and watched the

slouching figure go swinging down the street. Here and there a trim Sunday figure paused, half turned, to gaze at the disordered dress and walk.

Oh, she knew now why Grace had come to her ! The egotism of her love seized on this broken wasted life as material for its own uses. It cried out that the ugly tale had been told as a warning, bidding her no longer hesitate. There was time yet—time for rescue, time for joy, time for her happiness and Michael's. What matter if Love's path led her into a strange wild lawless country wherein the desires of gods seemed earthly as the desires of men ? The road of respectability, with its lying sign-posts, was cluttered with shameful ruins. There was no real failure anywhere, except the loss of Love : there was no sin save the evil dream of a life without Love.

Drusilla went to the writing-table and wrote to Michael :

“ Dearest Mick,—I will come with you whenever you tell me.

“ DRUSILLA.”

She went to her new wardrobe and put on one of her dainty coats and big hats. She smiled at her reflection in the glass. Not Mrs. Cowie, but Drusilla who had awakened : she had never really been Cowie's wife. In the sunny awakening the dream showed smoke-like, grotesque, frail, a thing without grief or terror. Nothing in her life had ever been real except Michael. Nothing anywhere was real, or worthy of serious consideration, except Love.

She went down the bright street and dropped the letter into a pillar-box.

V

A scaffolding reared above The Corner House showed where the rose-coloured room was being built. Around, the trees, afire with greens, thrilled and rang all day with the bridal songs of birds.

Michael Quentin was coming and going among filings of wood and stones and sand and groups of workmen ; as Alick Cowie had come and gone nearly a year ago.

Of course there were differences. . . . Cowie, blushing and with a quickened breath, used to dash up, at odd hours of leisure, to seize a sight of the development of a tiny flat, a mere mouse-hole in a tall tenement ; or to snatch at an interview with a coy agent, very much on the defensive.

Michael, during most of the hours of work, was within call of the builders : they deferred, in a certain measure, to his wishes—though they did this less than any one who had not five thousand a year might have supposed. It was not a little white flat that Michael was waiting to see, but a rose-coloured room, a fit habitation for a Maeterlinck princess.

There were other differences, of course, than the mere financial one of Michael's five thousand and Cowie's four hundred. Michael . . . felt differently from Cowie. . . . Yes : his feelings were different from Cowie's.

He was going to have a rose-garden made around the long room which was built at an end of the house, behind and at right angles to the violet guest-chamber. There was to be a lawn in the centre of the garden, flanked with rose-alleys, the whole enclosed by trees. Drusilla and he would hardly need to go beyond the

confines of his twenty acres : he was going to have it all made so beautiful, so full of delights. He was having a tennis-court made and a croquet-lawn : he was going to buy a steam-yacht, as Drusilla had said that she was afraid of the slippery white kind. They could go long cruises ; and they would have long runs in the motor to woods and hills and rivers and towns and cities—to all the fair places that Nature or man had made and that Drusilla had not seen. . . . She had said with her woebegone air, beset by fears, that she wished that the conditions of his mother's will did not compel them to spend the greater part of the year in Scotland.

“ Because of people . . . ” Drusilla faltered.

But wait till she saw ! Michael made her realise, in some measure, how a command over material things enabled people to live almost independently of their neighbours' opinions. Let her picture twenty acres of woodland, of garden and seashore, and every foot of it made fair for the treading of her feet. He was glad of his money. Money could build a fairy palace for Love's abiding and circle it round with barriers that shut out the censuring, staring world ; even with barriers that shut out the world's reason and righteousness, its faith, its pity.

Coming . . . coming ; and all the universe seemed to thrill and throb like a great monster, æon-slumbered, moving to the impulse of its awakening. She was coming, and the ground had known it long ago. The trees and the earth were breaking into joy-fires of pure green flame. All the years of their growing had been just for this one spring. All the griefs and bewilderments of Michael's soul, his seemingly senseless birth and upbringing, his struggles to understand

God and to help men, had been lived through so that he might stand with her here, under the trees, on the grass snowed with Bethlehem stars and lighted with celandines.

And all of The Corner House had been conceived and built so that that rose-coloured room might be added. Rollo had known that.

As Michael wandered about, returning every now and then within sight of the builders, he constantly imagined Rollo by his side ; so vividly present sometimes that (it seemed) a swift wheeling movement must surprise his visible form and compel it to stay. It had not been possible to explain, to the solemn-eyed architect who had complimented him on his clear conception and description of the rose-coloured room, that the thing was not his own, but Rollo's. The architect had not the air of a man who believed in communications "from the other side."

But Rollo had planned the room long ago (Michael knew) and had kept his idea ready ; foreboding that a day would come when all Michael Quentin's patriotism, all his faith, all his altruism, would be sucked into the fathomless whirlpool of a man's desire for a maiden ; when his immense dream of the design of the universe—ring on ring of rejoicing stars peopled by acclaiming hosts of men and angels converging towards a Central Source of Light—had shrunk to a dream of the warm perishing petals and the mysterious bright heart of one little rose.

Rollo had known that she was coming ; and now it pleased Michael to fancy that Rollo stood by his side watching the builders, wandered with him under the bird-thrilling trees or along the shore ; entered

the house with him and sat with him at table, hearing without the voices of the workmen, the clinks and rattlings and blows that told of the gradual materialisation of the rose-coloured dream. . . . Once Michael let his fancy play with the thought that Rollo was mounting the stair to the white studio ; and he rose and followed the phantom.

The roses under the rood had fallen to pieces and lay, a heap of purple and pallid petals. Michael stood staring at the figure on the cross—the symbol of his father's faith of humility and self-sacrifice ; his own wildly accepted symbol of altruism. He remembered how he had prayed, agonisedly, that, in this struggle beyond his strength, help might be sent from the other side.

How glad he was now that no help had come !

VI

Michael was going to take Drusilla to Ireland for the summer, then to return to The Corner House. They had arranged to meet quietly at St. Enoch's station at eleven o'clock on the morning of the twenty-fifth of April. Cowie went to his consulting-rooms in Barrowman's shop at ten.

On the twenty-fourth Michael came up to Mrs. Wylie's. He had intended to spend the evening with Racie Moore, hoping, in his self-conscious way, that the memory of it would stay with Racie, softening him towards his friend. Michael had even a fantastic thought of telling Racie his purpose.

"Faith, it would astonish him," Michael thought, smiling : he enjoyed using the expletive "Faith," to which Racie was inclined to deny his right.

But his own smile made him realise that it would not be possible to speak of this thing to Racie save with a hideous pretence of lightness. It was because it was to be done earnestly, with a passion of delight, that it would seem abhorrent in Racie's eyes.

Michael found that he could not spend the evening with his friend : his heart turned from the hypocrisy that it must be. He could not talk to Mrs. Wylie, nor bear her presence in the room as she lingered to give him some particulars regarding the gathering of the beech and pine nuts with which her son Richard covered frames. Richard, it appeared, was thinking of showing something at the Edinburgh Industrial Exhibition.

"Oh, indeed. Certainly. Indeed he should," Michael said. He wanted to be nice to Mrs. Wylie : there was a quick pang of heart-sickness in the thought that she might refuse to have him staying with her again, no matter how much he paid. . . . Still, she had often spoken of how she depended on his money, and everything might be made right.

It was a pale blue evening, dry and dusty, and Michael went out and wandered about the streets, wishing that the light would go. Coming back, he lay down in an arm-chair and tried to read. He had bought some cigarettes and he smoked two with a sense of adventure : but they disappointed him by a curious insipidity, nor did they produce the dreamy feelings that he remembered long ago.

Mrs. Wylie brought supper.

"I know you've given up wine, Mr. Quentin, ever since you were abroad with poor old Mr. Patullo. But Richard got this bottle specially from a friend that's in Parrott's, the wine-merchants. A glass of

it'll do you good : you're looking tired. We mustn't be too hard on the creature comforts," Mrs. Wylie went on with her discreet smile. "There's Bible for it, you know—Paul and Timothy, you know, Mr. Quentin."

"Sure, that was for his stomach's sake," Michael said, laughing. . . . "Perhaps it's just my heart that's bothering me."

"Ah, it's often the stomach when people think it's the heart," Mrs. Wylie said. Then, realising that a gentleman-lodger had jested without the decency of encouragement, she added humorously : "Is that so, indeed, Mr. Quentin ? We're all waiting to hear something of the kind."

Michael ate and drank ; and the wine, to which he had grown unaccustomed, brought a pleasant blurring of his thoughts. As he lay down he was able to hope that Racie might . . . might . . . The truth was, it was not possible to imagine the thing that Racie might do : but Michael hoped that it might be something not hostile, perhaps not even wholly unsympathetic.

As he fell asleep it occurred to him that Alexander Cowie might fall in love with some other girl.

Michael awoke very early and bathed and dressed in water and air of a startling coldness. Exulting in the pure chill, the contest between his running blood and the unsunned air, he stood at his bedroom window to watch the dawn-light which was reflected in lowered tones in the mirror above the chimney-piece. He smiled as the brightness caught the varnished cones, the little rollers of fir-wood with their edentated bark, on Richard's photograph-frames. Michael wondered

if some not yet dead sap thrilled within them, remembering how dawn came to the woods.

The stacks and heaps in the wood-yard seemed a great mass of fruity brown-purple, solemnly sombre ; and radiance welled out from behind it, mounting higher and higher, growing more intense. Not a rosy radiance, but a clear amber that keyed up to a gold-white, stainless and searching. The blocks of the buildings and the fine lines of chimneys showed blue-black, and the silent pavements shone. . . . A fair day was coming—surely the fairest that man ever awaited or gods conceived.

“ But a little cold,” Michael thought, smiling. He would shut the window.

He was weak with cold. An abominable sense of weakness was gripping him. “ I’ve been overdoing it,” he thought. “ Getting myself run down with all that praying and lying awake and so on. . . . And those stimulants last night—I’ve got out of the way of them. They really lower the vitality finally though for the time they give energy. . . .”

He was amused by the resemblance that this bore to a Food Reform pamphlet. He would shut the window and make some coffee. He jumped on a chair and stood for a minute glorying in the flood of light that streamed down on him. . . . The old-fashioned sash was stiff and he strove to push it upwards. . . .

Then, sudden, blundering, compassionate, belated, help came from the other side.

Michael climbed down from the chair and, wavering, sank on his knees beside it.

VII

Drusilla had seen all her flat set in order, and explained to the maid that she might not get back from town in time for early dinner. She had a desire, which (she knew) was purely sentimental in the midst of her ruthlessness, that Alick should eat this one dinner happily.

She left the house, carrying a hand-bag. She still wore her wedding-ring, her engagement-ring, and the curb bracelet that Cowie had given. She had decided that she must not send these things back to him when she wrote to him. It would have been a cruel, vulgar act, such as women were guilty of in novels and dramas. She did not want to be vulgar and cruel.

She passed the Frenchwoman's bassinet in the close where, on fine days, it generally stood till evening. On the top of its cosiness there was a blanket which Drusilla herself had embroidered as a neighbourly gift. She looked at it, and at the other familiar objects that she passed, in the hurried, involuntary fashion of a woman who is going for a boat or a train and whose mind is full of little resolves under which, perhaps, pulse sorrows and regrets.

She walked all the way to the station, moving swiftly and steadily, swinging her hand-bag, a fine colour in her cheeks. As she entered the station, gazing up at the clock, people looked at her and turned their heads to look again.

She was early, and she went to the bookstall and stood looking at the paper covers displayed ; moving quickly away from any one who came to stand near her, and starting at the sight of every figure that

resembled any acquaintance. She told herself that, to-morrow, she would be done for ever with fears of people's doings and sayings. But to-day the door of her soul's prison-house had just clanged behind her and she was still in the shadow of it and quivering with the sound.

The hands of the clock moved to mark eleven. She was still searching the crowds for Michael's figure with the excited walk, the coat flying open, the ridiculous hair, the eager face. None of the men she saw coming and going—not one of the men and women that she had been seeing all her life—had a beautiful face like Michael's. They were all discoloured by unwholesome habits, seared and furrowed by ignoble cares, beaten into patience by submission to laws. Only Michael had dared to snap the chains—so grotesquely brittle—that bound her soul and his ; to carry her off to Love's wild lawless country where there was no duty, only delight. What wonder that she and Michael shone, beautiful and young, in a crowd of the mean and the weary ?

Michael did not come, and the radiance of her mood was dulled. . . . Then fear came. What had happened ? Suddenly she knew that the world, enraged at the exposure of its own stupidity, was her enemy and Michael's. The stupid, false world was ready to fight with violence against people who did what she and Michael were doing.

She waited till a quarter to twelve : pacing to and fro, gradually less regardful of glances. Then, chilled, almost terrified, with a face that had fallen into lines of fatigue and despondency, she went out of the station, hailed a cab and was driven to Mrs. Wylie's.

VIII

“ Oh, miss . . . ” Mrs. Wylie said. “ Oh, miss . . . I’d knocked twice to tell Mr. Quentin breakfast was ready, and never got an answer ; so thinking to myself there was something wrong, I took the freedom of opening the door, and there was the poor young gentleman kneeling by the chair with the sun pouring down on his head. I did everything I could . . . we sent over the road at once for Dr. Gateley ; and he said it was . . . no use. Oh, miss . . . I’d sent down to the works for Richard and Jim : Richard’s crying like a child in the kitchen now. And we’ve sent to look for Mr. Moore at *The Mercury*—he wasn’t to be found in his rooms. Oh, miss . . . The doctor and I lifted the poor young gentleman on to the bed. The doctor says it was heart failure and no pain—and that’s a thing to be thankful for, and plain enough from the look of him. He’s got the smile of an angel. He was always such a good, nice-behaved young gentleman, Mr. Quentin.”

Mrs. Wylie suddenly sank into silence, and went away, pale and compassionate, as she saw Drusilla turn towards Michael’s door. Drusilla had not spoken her name ; and the landlady’s thought leaped to the essential part of the truth.

Drusilla opened the door. Unhappy woman who, entering a room, found the man she loved lying dead ! . . .

She sat down by the bed and watched Michael. Oh, happy woman who could sit so, alone with him, in the silence ! Happy woman who knew that she had made him happy, that he had died full of joy of her creating ! She wished that she had gone a day

earlier, so that, if this were inevitably the day of Michael's death, he might have died in her arms.

A ring resounded through the quiet house, there were hushed footsteps and voices. Mrs. Wylie tapped.

"Mr. Moore's come, ma'am—he's in the dining-room. He says, may he see you?"

Drusilla rose, trembling. The landlady had altered her "miss" to "ma'am." What had Racie Moore said to her? It was as if the conventions of the world came close to her again, clutching at her throat.

Racie was standing in the dining-room; terribly pale, neat in his light overcoat, his crush hat under his arm. He faced her, with eyes full of hostility to this woman who had lured Michael Quentin down to the level of other men.

"I was to meet him at the station," Drusilla said. "We were going away. He didn't come, so I came here."

Racie walked to the window and stood, his profile towards her.

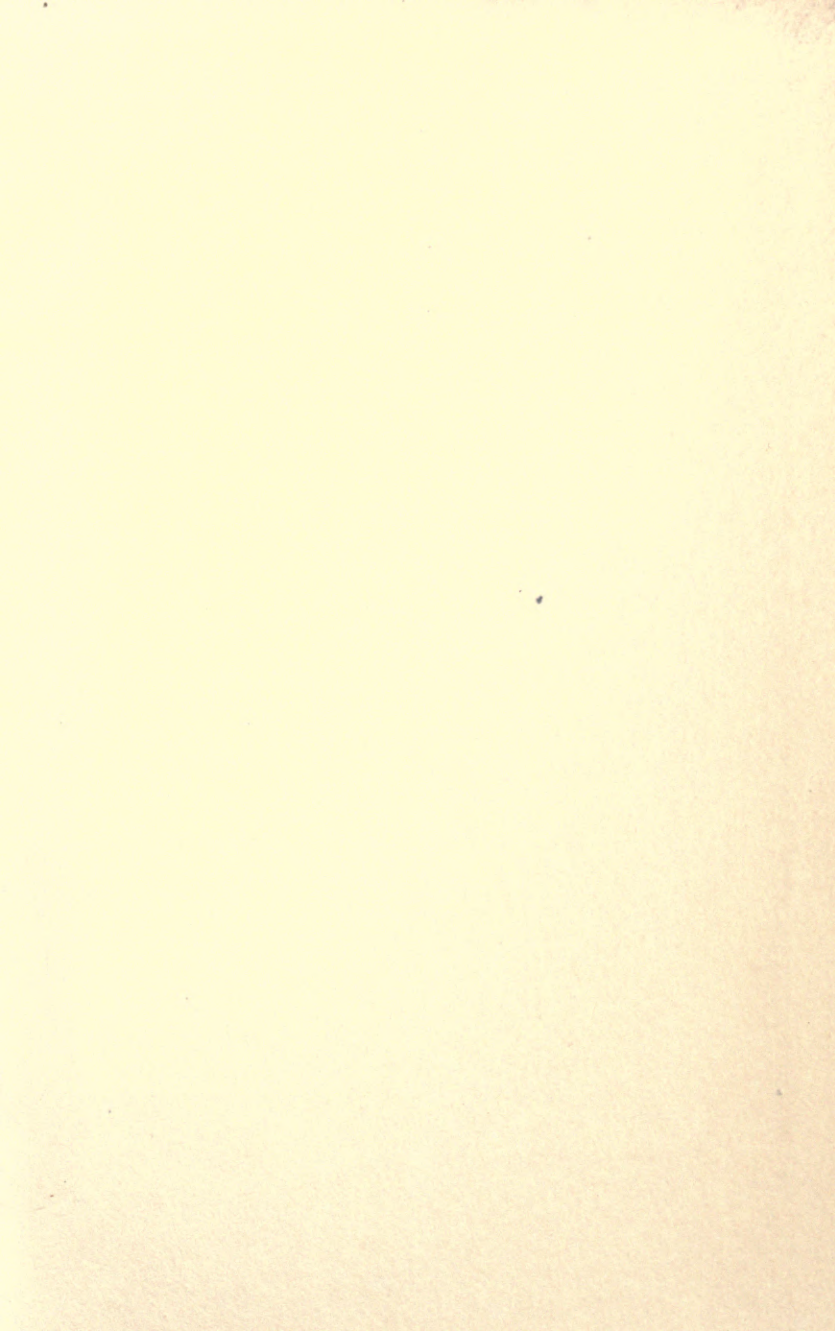
"You'd better go back," he said in his quiet voice. "I'll call a cab for you. . . . You'd better go home." What had she been able to do? What was the use of blaming her? His rage of jealousy, seeking the relief of contempt, said that she was only a bundle of "feminine charms."

"You'd better go home," he repeated in his cold, dry, throaty voice.

He called a cab. Drusilla looked from its windows at the sunny coloured city, full of spring flowers, of fresh paint and gilding, of the frivolous strife of bread-winning and pleasure-seeking, of meetings and partings. She wondered if God had sent an angel down with a flaming sword to save her from destruc-

tion. . . . Or had her feet taken a firmer hold of Hell ?

She got down at Fifteen Ainslie Street. Odours of cooking came from the tenement : baby-carriages were being wheeled to and fro. As Drusilla stood on the steps, feeling in her purse for silver for the cabman, the sunlight fell about her " tenderly as about a helpless thing."





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